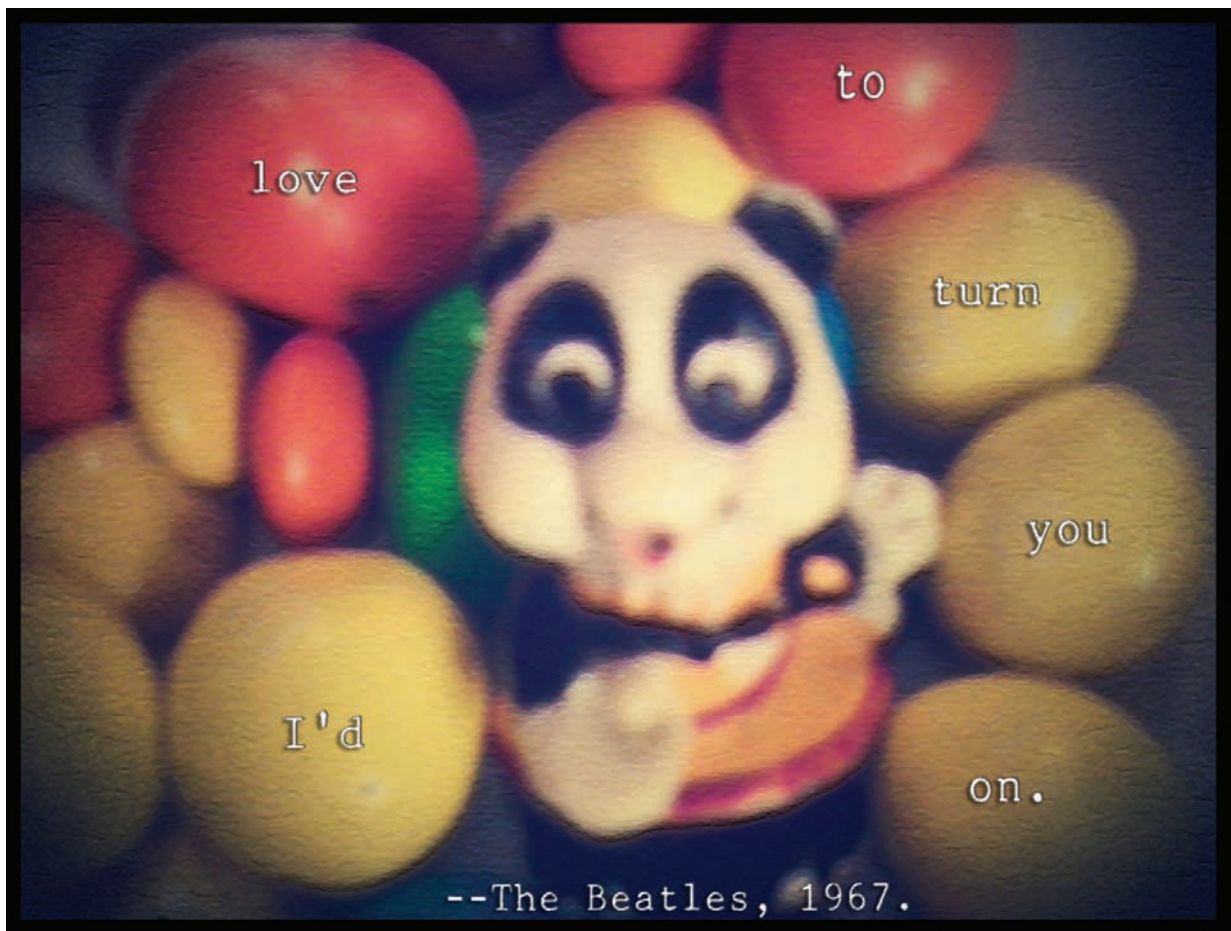


The Cenacle



NUMBER 100 ♦ JUNE 2017



love

to

turn

you

I'd

on.

--The Beatles, 1967.

July 15, 2017
11:10 p.m.
Caffé Bene, Mass. Ave.
Boston, MA.

This is Issue #100 of The Cenacle, & welcome! It's taken 22 years & a few months to arrive at this point in this periodical's history. I've been mulling recently how to approach writing this piece.

Spent the whole of today into tonight reading & editing the material that will comprise this issue. Then, the last couple of hours, reading through Cenacles #1-12, dated from April 1995 to June 1996.

They were dear & mostly longtime-known souls, to me in those early issues. Burke, Bergeron, Dillon, Shorette, Emerson, Aoki, Heitner, Amante, Brannon. Friends from my college days in Connecticut; Brannon & McDoughlin too, & Amante for that matter, came along when I moved to Boston in 1992.

We drank together, shared each others' lives & Art, wrote about each

-24-

after. Gathered eight times a year at
Roma Restaurant for our Jellicoe Literary
Guild meetings.

I loved them all. I treasured
their Art. All of them but Burke lives
yet somewhere in the world. All of
them are far away from me tonight,
have been for a long time.

So those early Cenacles are a
complex portrait of a time & a place,
a set of friends. A sadness in the
passage of time — & yet.

We shared those nights of Art,
which I recorded. We shared the
pages of this periodical, which exists
yet. The Jellicoe Guild exists too.

What I want to say to all those
names that are no more than names
to most reading these pages is:

I haven't forgotten any of you,
on those glorious old years, & I
thank you & treasure you still.

I learned no easier than most
that life is change & growth & loss.
The intimacies & ecstasies of one or
many days & nights can often disappear
spend out over time. Things change.

-25-

Yet I've also learned how the heart's memories persist, not just of people of course. Places, possessions, Nature, dreams & desires.

My friend Jim Burke III would often say to me: "We are who we were; but not who we will become!" & he would laugh his big man's laugh, his blue-green eyes sparkling.

He remains, years after his passing, the wisest, deepest, dearest, & funniest person I've ever known.

But what did he mean by that? It's like he was saying ~~that~~ that all we've been arrives us to now, but is not equal to now. He was a great lover of mathematics & this statement seems to mix that love with his love of Eastern thought, mescaline, LSD, & every Irishman's fondness for a well-turned phrase.

So the me that has arrived to this page is, & is not, the editor of the previous 94 issues of this journal. What to do with this?

-26-
If anything at all. Maybe
I am all those Solids, but ig-
nited by this moment, live now,
not what I was, because none of those
previous mes had experienced this
moment. Maybe this is a good
thought on the matter; maybe I
am over-thinking it.

I miss those people, those days,
yet one begins to stumble & fall by
too often looking backwards. I cherish
the writers in this issue too. I
cherish how my beloved Kassi
has made it look so wonderful.

What The Cenacle is to me is
a beautiful series of recordings of
what bits of time & space were like
to me & people I was lucky enough
to know. Some of the best bits of
it all.

To all of you who've shared 100
issues of this periodical with me,
I say: you've bettered my life,
you've saved my heart, you've helped
to make me the Artist I wished to be.
D&H, 7/15/2017 Boston, MA.

The Cenacle

NUMBER 100 • JUNE 2017

Edited by Raymond Souland Jr.

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Souland

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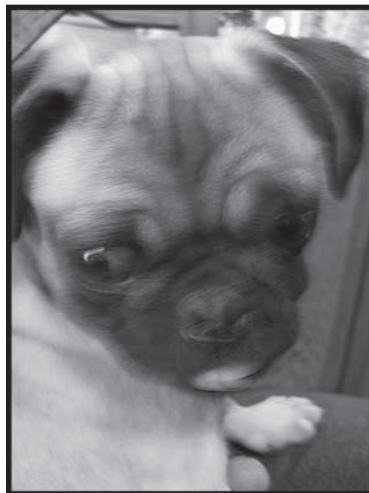
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In anticipation of *Cenacle* | 1 | April 1995: “Anyway, this new project has certainly added excitement to my life. As long as it remains a good presence, I’ll keep going with it.” RS, letter to Mark Bergeron, 04.April.1995. *100 issues & still going . . .*



SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND
2017

Feedback on Cenacle 99 | April 2017

From Tamara Miles:

Ace Boggess' "Watching *The Wizard of Oz* in Prison": This poem resonated with me for several reasons. First, like many others, I have had incarcerated loved ones. A former student is in prison right now. Also, I have taught a course in prison writings, featuring a collection of essays by imprisoned women called *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* (edited by Wally Lamb). I'm also an advocate for prison writing programs.

In this poem, the uncomfortable chairs at the beginning were an effective way to introduce prison life, and the prisoners' disenchantment with *The Wizard of Oz* a sign of the reality that brought them out of their own innocence, and into fractured dreams and the limitations of fantasy life. Dot's innocence, as it is referred to, is something we all both long to know again, and to escape from, so this experience helps bridge the separation between people on the outside and on the inside.

The sound and visual imagery is strong, and the diction rich. The way the speaker assumes traits of Dorothy's fellow travelers gave me a smile, especially because we know that the Tin Woodsman and the Cowardly Lion were each both better and braver than they thought.

From Nathan D. Horowitz:

Tamara Miles' poem "The Giving-Artist": the narrator speaks to a woman (I think) caring for her dying husband (I think), finding that caring is an art. This is shown through crisp details like the narrator twisting a lock of his hair between her fingers, a makeover: "You sculpt a day from each tentative morning." Giving an injection becomes needlepoint. The poem is poignant, like the needle; it gives hope, in the face of despair, that even dying can be limned by kindness, craft, imagination, art.

Ace Boggess' "Watching *The Wizard of Oz* in Prison" proved to me that poetry can still make me cry.

From Ace Boggess:

Tamara Miles' poems are loaded with hidden edges so you think you're reaching for something sleek and smooth, but pull back after you've cut your hands. They're pointed like that. I found them beautiful, but they also left me feeling meditative. "This Is My Body" especially mesmerized me, and I found myself contemplating the final image—its power and warmth. It gave me quite a jolt.

From Judih Haggai:

Since February, I have been through a heavy period of back and forth from Israel to Canada, with a little Albany and Boston thrown in between. This was the period of my father's physical exit, passing away on May 30th.

Since then he shows up periodically in his favorite chair, or huddled on the couch, his baseball cap firmly in place. I stop to cry when I realize that his smiling face is no longer a part of the scenery, and that his green eyes aimed upwards were his final views of the world.

And, truthfully, lately, I seldom respond to poetry. I have too many unexpressed images rattling round my brain—no room for more—

Only the work of Martina Newberry, in which she asks so little of me, just the barest nod, just the slightest shrug of a shoulder, to convey that I hear her, that I respond to her, that I appreciate her words. She generously saves me from having to search for a suitable expression for a new abstraction.

I'm referring to "Wrack Zone" with lines like: "Tell me what you / will have for lunch and / with whom you will share / a nap."

She offers me triggers, her imagery guides me, paints my mind and I, passive to so much of the external world, can contribute my bits of utterance. We all can answer, and together will surely find our scraps of experience come together in a future Martina quilt.

From Martina Newberry:

I loved the last issue. This magazine encompasses *so much* fine work.

From Colin James:

Charlie Beyer's essay "Prostate Panic" is laugh-out-loud funny. I know of several friends who have had the surgery he describes so imaginatively. One of them had to use a shunt before it was done. Meaning every time he had to piss, he would stick a plastic tube up his penis to relive himself.

I questioned whether Charlie's story would be good reading for my friends, who are both doing OK now. I decided yes, and am passing Charlie's story along to them.

From David Hartley:

Charlie Beyer's "Prostate Panic" is powerful, intense, honest. I am feeling the swell of panic. As a fellow pissed-off fifty-something, I am having sympathetic pains, and my hands quiver.

I am aghast with horror as periodic bursts of laughter cough out from me. That's great writing, Charlie. You have guts. I can't imagine what that was like. But, thankfully, you gave me enough to get myself checked out. Woke me right up. Thoughts are with you towards a rapid recovery.

I'm at loss for words here. Gonna ask my girlfriend to spit on her finger now. Take care.

From Jimmy Heffernan:

I particularly resonated, bittersweetly, with Joe Coleman's poem "Timid." It transports me back to high school days and, sadly, days more recent than that. We wallflowers are the secret romantics, the outward stoics, bursting with emotion on the inside. I have drunk many women in with thirsty eyes, and famished soul as well.

This poem is a tribute to those of us who know this timid pain. All too often, our desperate designs are to say something, anything, with the hope of being granted a chance to dance. And, all too often, we merely watch them dance with someone else instead. Mr. Coleman understands this perfectly well, and I salute him.

From Patrick Gene Frank:

Joe Coleman's poem "Forty Five": It is a truly frightening situation with Trump as President, more so than with Bush or Nixon. This man has no conscience, there is something wrong with his brain, and he is an egomaniac. He has surrounded himself with a number of right-wing extremists. Coleman is right—he has the nuclear codes. I think it is likely he will initiate a full-scale war with some country.

Gregory Kelly's poem "day 3 february 2009: psalm 40": the twists and turns of the car, the cancer, the eventual loss of control, a pregnant series of images. I have shared the experience of the poet, at some level—especially the twists and turns of life—

Raymond Soulard Jr.'s "Dreams Raps 2016": these seem to be conceived on the borderline between concrete reality and a kind of poetic-symbolic reality. Interesting. It is amazing how much detail he puts into these pieces.

Patrick Gene Frank



A fake smile is easier to spot
than a meteor
flashing across the sky

* * *

A turtle attempting to cross I-26
lost in a dream
but we could not stop

* * *

Bless the children
bless the working poor
bless those who engage in straight talk

* * *

Buried in paperwork
I need the feel of the hawk
the mountain
the slanted light

* * *

Fiona our PTSD cat
now sleeping peacefully beside me
a break in her misery

* * *

I drove past
the pool hall and sex shop
on Route 25
and death came to mind

* * *

It actually feels good
to scrape the bottom of the barrel
once in a while

* * *

I remember when I used to hit
rock after rock
over the back fence
as a kid

* * *

I wonder why
at this moment
I feel peace
and the cicadas are singing deep inside

* * *

Music
and the cry of the dove
and the distant stars
keep me whole

* * *

My last gig could be
sitting cross-legged
on the sidewalk
playing bare-bones guitar

* * *

There are people who secretly think
they are Christ and
they are either lying or crazy

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

*"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Through the Door in the Wall: 20 Years of Tripping

*The following is a version of some of the events that occurred to me back in 1997,
the year I first tried LSD. I've recently dived into many of my old notebooks,
trying to dig into daylight again who I was back then. Let old pages reveal anew.
How my path has shifted, & shifted again & again, because of my experiences that year.
I was near 34 years old when my psychedelic adventures began, on April 5, 1997.*

* * *

April

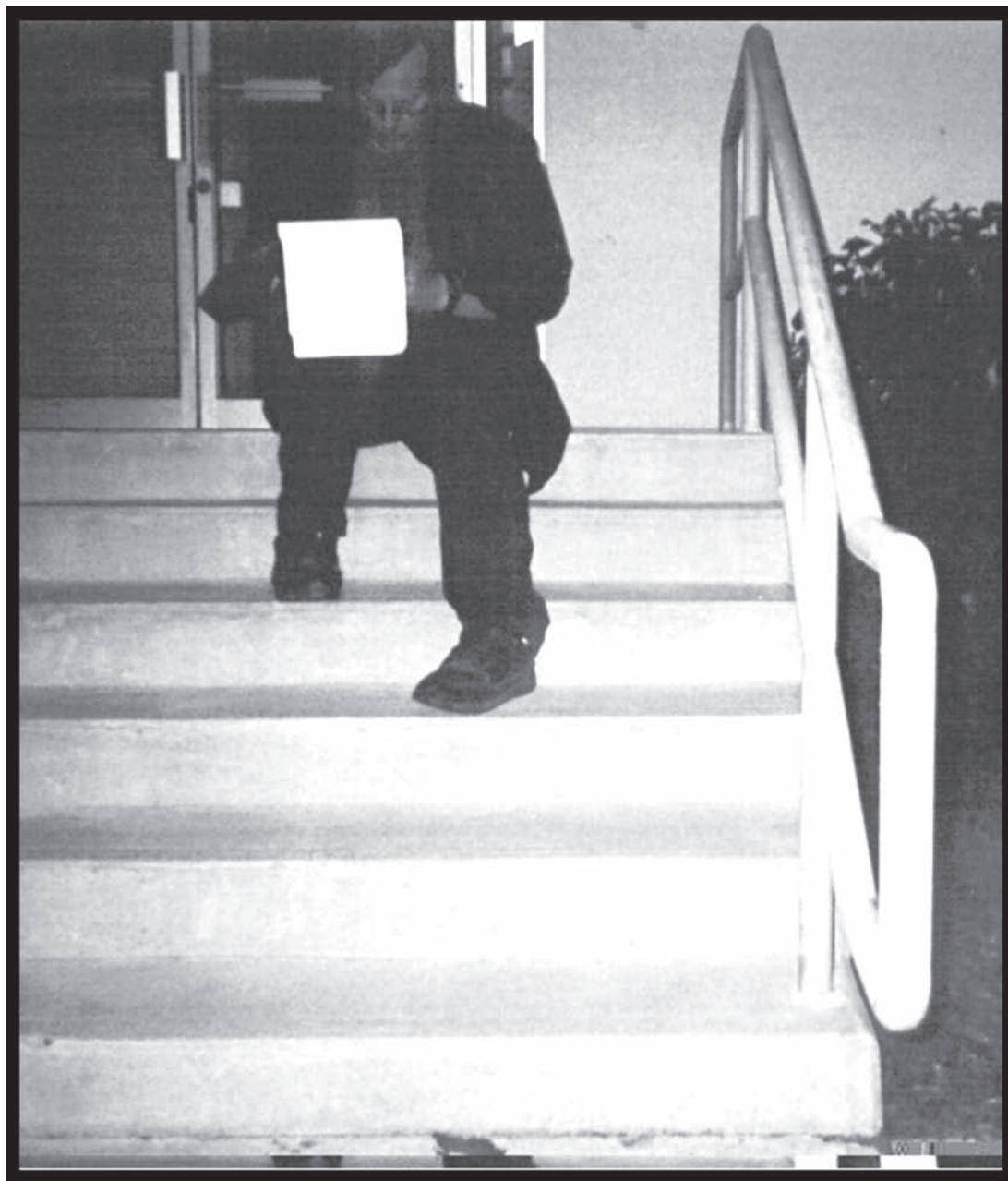
*"Rather, God is everything that exists, though everything that exists is not God. It is present in everything,
and everything comes into being from it. Nothing is devoid of its divinity. Everything is within it;
it is within everything and outside of everything. There is nothing but it."*

—*The Essential Kabbalah* (Daniel C. Matt, ed.), 1995.

Yesterday, after a long exhausting week of bookseller work, I had jury duty. Picked to be on the jury for an assault and kidnapping case, despite my protests. But then dismissed, free to leave, escape the minions of State power, manifested.

So last night I celebrated with the dollar-a-glass Portagee red wine at my current favorite bar-dive, Eddie's Place in Cambridge. In the wood-paneled back room pumping the jukebox with quarters to hear Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama," Bob Seger's "Like a Rock," The Who, Aerosmith, Tom Petty, & the like.

Waiting for Ric. I remember thinking: when I was 17, I still could've joined the race of men,



but it didn't happen. My parents taught me nothing of the world & how to travel it well. Jenny smiled & turned me down, & so I sought love in a clumsy stumbling way, each new encounter emphasizing my ignorance, my inadequacy. Ever struggling with these old angers & woes, not knowing a way to salve them new. Mud uncertainty. Then, now.

Ric finally came & we escalated the red wine night higher & higher. He had a Jack Kerouac book to shout from, too, & there were dartboards on the wall to try, *higher & higher*, & then a moment on snowy Carnal Street near my studio apartment in ZombieTown, long & dark but for very occasional street lamps, deserted buildings, when he kneeled & kissed the pavement, praising everything.

He then reclined back in a small hill of snow, like a drunken Winter King, & asked me if I live in faith or doubt, *demanding that I kneel too & praise everything!* So I did. "All is well & divine!" he cried to the strange, quiet, mysterious street.

We lay later in my studio apartment, him on my beat old futon, me on my old beat mattress, talking of death, deciding neither of us was at peace enough or ready for it. He told me he was visiting his friend Hartlee the next evening in Milkrose, the richer town next to ZombieTown, & I should come & meet him too. Some kind of crazy psychedelic visionary.

So today I saw David Cronenberg's film *Crash*, a really fucked-up movie about sex & car crashes, like David Lynch's *Lost Highway*, but even harsher.

Now headed for Hartlee's house. Wondering what drugs will be taken & what experiences will come.

* * *

Just took acid: notes—

*Nothing yet
high is high
no other
there is no we
there is no I
pages of poetry
all blank
there is no here*

* * *

The night went on forever. I'll never forget it to my last day. I was with safe people. Hartlee's face changing skin color, Caucasian to Latin to Black. Back & forth. His desktop computer screen scaring me. Grateful Dead music for hours, making sense now. The tribalism of their shows, people traveling with their tours for months on end, part of a new kind of community

I can barely imagine. Hartlee's happy memories of these tours back in the 1970s. The music as something sacred & beautiful & fun in the heart of it all. Hartlee loves the lyrics to the Dead's song "Eyes of the World":

*Wake up to find out that you are the eyes of the world,
The heart has its beaches, its homeland, and thoughts of its own.
Wake now, discover that you are the song that the morning brings,
But the heart has its seasons, its evenings, and songs of its own.*

I made it through, I think. Late on, Hartlee reading aloud from trashy bestsellers for our entertainment. Ric smiling mysteriously, looking both dead & alive. Night ending by mutual consent, early morning, sleep. I was & am grateful to these two men in a unique & perpetual way. They saw me safely through the Door.

* * *

Next day, afternoon. They're out getting bagels, & movies to rent, & I'm here listening to sad classical music, Beethoven I think, & seeing if I can still write, & I think I can, though not very well at the moment.

Ric was reading some Dylan Thomas poetry earlier, very sad, very holy music:

*My tears are like the quiet drift
Of petals from some magic rose;
And all my grief flows from the rift
Of unremembered skies and snows.
I think, that if I touched the earth,
It would crumble;
It is so sad and beautiful,
So tremulously like a dream.*

I've stepped through the Door, finally & lastly, & there isn't any going back, even if I wished to. It's confirmed.

*Tripping laughing talking it's all OK
Now the music is spritely and beautiful*

Thinking also about Art, & discipline, & devotion, & gift, & tenacity.

*To Hartlee
Ground that is never absent
to wishing lips
Enough sunrise to console
3 am's dark prayer*

*The sadness you keep after a
moment of crowded woe
The will to meet eyes and hope
for bells your glance provokes
Absent Godd, absent lover, absent
mother, worse, present all at once*

*Art: the horn cleaved in your heart
as you dangle in reddening darkness.*

Drugs. Pens. Sex. Music. Books. Movies. Pictures. What else? Godd. Death.

Tripping & needing all of today to land, knowing that one's obsessions, like an old coat, necessary, ugly, all you've got really.

* * *

A few days later. Near midnight. Bench in Copley Square, near Boston Public Library, the insanely tall & weirdly blue Hancock Tower, the pretty old Trinity Church. Worrying amounting to not-much. *All is well & divine?* I'm trying.

Mine is a sloppily contrived life whose only solid hope lies in Art.

I'll be gone from my bookseller job soon, three-plus years of working there amounting only to paying my rent & bills every month. I'll be a graduate student again, this fall, this time at Emerson College, this time MFA in Creative Writing. *Can I do this?*

Taking acid showed me that Art is illusion but, I have decided, *I do not believe this*. Acid is a path. Art is a path.

You see, Art has been & is my only hope. Not love or religion or money or even friendship. Beyond all these for me is Art—beyond Art is silence & annihilation. I choose life—I choose Art.

Dropping acid disturbed me deeply but that's OK—I go on—& may take acid again, if I have the chance.

* * *

Now Carnal Street, oft-enjoyed steps of defunct Rohm Tech building. Years me living in ZombieTown, Mass., old factory town, just north of Boston, poorer than the towns nearby, like Milkrose. Street lit up by many streetlamps, their strange *hmmmming*. The night is mild & peaceful. Me coming to the usual conclusions: *Art is sacred, Art is all, Art is the path, Art is the means, Art is the destination.*

Cars pass by once in awhile. At peace, right now, to reflect, to appreciate the pine tree near these steps, to enjoy the mild air.

I am 13 again, delivering newspapers before dawn. *All is well & divine.*

* * * * *

May

*But the man who comes back through the Door in the Wall
will never be quite the same as the man who went out. He will be wiser
but less cocksure, happier but less self-satisfied, humbler in acknowledging
his ignorance yet better equipped to understand the relationship
of words to things, of systematic reasoning to the unfathomable
Mystery which it tries, forever vainly, to comprehend.*

—Aldous Huxley, “Doors of Perception,” 1954.

Hartlee’s house. 5 a.m. Late on in second acid trip with him & Ric. A warping long day into night. Walking through a local drug store, nearly lost in the candy aisle. Hehe. More early Grateful Dead music. *“A box of rain will ease the pain. And love will see you through . . .”*

TV awhile. *Simpsons*. *King of the Hill*. *X-Files*. Acid started hitting hard during *X-Files*, but it was OK. Mulder finds irrefutable proof of aliens. Spooky shit.

Later on, talk of technology, the Internet, the inner spaces of humanity. Hartlee maintained that the Internet is useful & possibly politically expedient—I countered with a lot of mucky metaphysical talk, somewhat wild-eyed romantic, somewhat bitter idealist, somewhat simply whacked. Images whirling in my mind of dinosaur-bone-clockmaker versus man on the moon. Art as Eternity wrapped by tight cord of Ego. Whirling. *Crazy motherfucker, whirling.*

It was fun, exhausting. Toward dawn, those guys sleeping, I was on a couch, comfortable, writing a little, reading a book called *Hallucinogens & Culture*, about Native American tribes & their ritual use of peyote. To salve, to praise.

I know what I do out in the functioning world can be less painful than what I do now, a family technical bookstore gone corporate greedy, giving my sorry hippie ass the slow shove, inch by inch, day by day, them not knowing yet that I’ll be going by my own will soon.

Surviving there till I finally escape its potent, destructive illusion. Every day I go there, the old call of the abyss ever pulling at me, crying, “You’re worthless! You’re shit-nothing!” Mud uncertainty.

I’m not going to Emerson to learn how to sell my work. My work is not for sale. I’m not going to change it for anyone or anything.

I know what matters, that when I’m writing what I want, and how I want—on the other side of

the Door, floating through the Cosmos, falling toward what is beneath all else, whose pulse & light manifest as our world—when I'm there, *now here, the world now there, as it should be—& who is to say anything but—?*

I hope I am brave enough to risk deeper voyages into inner space, and make peace with their apparent irrelevancy to the workaday world.

The birds are singing. Dawn is coming. *All is well & divine here & now—& tomorrow, & tomorrow after that—*

* * * * *

August

There is only one thing you should do. Go into yourself. Find out the reason that commands you to write; see whether it has spread its roots into the very depths of your heart; confess to yourself whether you would have to die if you were forbidden to write. This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: must I write? Dig into yourself for a deep answer. And if this answer rings out in assent, if you meet this solemn question with a strong, simple "I must," then build your life in accordance with this necessity; your whole life, even into its humblest and most indifferent hour, must become a sign and witness to this impulse.

—Rainer Maria Rilke, letter, 17 February 1903.

Hartlee's house. Mushroom trip that lasted till 5 a.m. or so. It was cool. Reading to him Ric's crazy letters from his new home in Seattle.

And my life becomes ever more circular as here I am back at the Panama Hotel, where I last lived from October 1990 to about May 1991 . . . and I'm in the room right next to the one I formerly occupied, a so-called "outside" room in that the window doesn't face another room in the interior of the building but looks out on a parking lot, a weed-covered hill beyond, a freeway beyond that (I-5, the major north-south thoroughfare along the entire West Coast), and a major swatch of cloudy/blue northwestern sky as far as the eye can see . . . I'm delighted to be here—alone, independent, healthy, solvent, anonymous, and so very grateful . . . to finally get into my poetry as never before . . . My intuition (and desire) tells me that my time is now in the sense of throwing myself fully into writing and reading aloud . . . I would like to meet some good poets and drinkers while here, be it for one month or one year, and now that I'm able to have this space alone I can begin to actively direct my passions to that end. [29 June 1997, Seattle, Washington]

"He's a fucking genius," Hartlee declared. We both miss him.

Then strange. Not like LSD in that it was far more familiar, no voyage beyond Pluto this time, more a voyage to a here & now far vaster than ordinarily perceived. Watching Hartlee's stereo



dance to its music, designs on the living room armchair & couch undulating friendly too.

Later, outside on the front steps, watching a patch of green lawn dance & breathe, shadows on it becoming gullies, all real-seeming, little of the abstract psychedelic at this point. Grateful for the trees, bushes, grass, for the stars above, seeing more, many more of them than usual.

Slept into a dream version of Hartlee's familiar living room, him there, & strange figures too. Then sweaty, colorful patterns, electrical currents, strange heavily rhythmic music, deep bass guitar & harsh voices. Yet, eyes open, it's just Hartlee's dark living room where all is still & quiet & seems ordinary. Eyes closed again, the colors & music & voices give way to a timeless place, soundless, sightless, a forever behind everything, calm beyond calm. Then exhaustion passing me to more familiar dreaming:

*Peripheral view of two small stars
beneath shaggy brown sunlight
above soft motion, soft secrets*

*All freely floating, green leaves in wind
Until an intending hand, dizzied by small stars
Introduces sunlight to water, softness to delight.*

Partied fuckass hard for days after leaving bookseller job. Scared of everything I am, of the future. But a month to gear up mentally for Emerson College. Make ready as I am able. It will be strange there.

Deeper states of consciousness is what I'm really aiming at—tribalism—new kind of community—I need to get further into this regardless of how Emerson goes—I've done so much this year thus far, but—

faster harder deeper better ART.

* * * * *

September

*Carnal Street. Tripping. Inside trip here is trip. Time distortions.
paranoia. heightened. sensory perception. feeling of intense oddness*

A long weekend at Hartlee's house, many hours smoking the green & releasing deeper into the tunes, led to a Monday trip, him showing me the virtual synthesizer he downloaded off the Internet, him jamming on it for hours as we whirled deeper into trip, at one point playing his guitar along to it, amazing stuff. His computer's desktop images grooving in & around & through the music . . . I left his place nighttime & it all got stranger then.

I'm tripping. I'm walking along but not moving. The five-minute walk from his house to the train

is taking forever. Dealing with getting on the train strange, but not hard. Then suddenly I'm in ZombieTown, going down train station stairs to exit to the street.

Now what? Lost down side streets. Standing at one point, just writing. Go into the all-night grocery store, buying some soda, & some food. Learning how to function under acid, like Ken Kesey advised.

Now go. Go! Get to Carnal Street. It will be safer & make more sense. Get there & start writing.

*near midnight 9/1/97:
Tripping on Carnal Street
now a thousand miles long
but benign
(it's a motherfucker's world)
but Carnal Street, still benign*

*how many cars cheat its air of silence?
(they careen rawly & fast)
crush under wheels the lamppost hmmm
the lampposts hmmm, and watch, and hmmm*

*a cricket, a lamp-post, sheered raw air
a pen combining two shadows now
even where shadows well there is hope*

*ready to walk along the music again
ready to meet elongated smile
ready to greet the spirits again
and what? and then?*

*it's a motherfucker's world
i told me acid told me so
risings & fallings for humans & sunsets
the lampposts hmmm'd & told me so—*

* * *

Back on Carnal Street, Rohm Tech steps, remembering that acid-high night a few days ago. Lights bore messages from UFOs. Cops were present, though hidden. Took a lot of concentration to make my way toward home.

Passed through the ancient cemetery, happy as always at this to-&-from-train passage, acknowledging the spirits there, grateful for them, daunted by the trees above me, *how high, how great*, & continued home. Arriving, later watching my studio apartment shimmy, my standing lamp rise miles into the air above me.

Acid instructs its user in the infinite of the interior & the unfathomable strangeness of the world. Similar psychedelic plants—peyote, mushrooms, & their like—grow naturally all over the world, & have been part of human religious ceremonies forever. Used respectfully, they reveal Walls, open Doors in those Walls, where once was but seeming mundanity.

Are these substances necessary to trip into the Godd, become obviously infinite? . . . No . . . but . . .

is prayer necessary to commune with the Sacred? is witnessing miracles necessary to prove all Creation miraculous? must I tell my loved ones I love them for them to be certain?

Our society wars with doubt, with selfishness, with laziness, with the inner beast & the inner angel within each of us. LSD, like Godd, like Art, like Love, like deepest grief, overwhelms us with our vastness, our great big tiny vastness. *We need salving. We wish to praise.*

Carnal Street, empty, lit, streetlamps & spotlights & weeds and electrical poles—“*Burn down the Mission, burn it down to stay alive,*” sings Elton John on my Walkman, *yes, yes*, piano full of friendly brawl—the past, the unknown, I have to represent the unreasonably mystical, magical approach to Art at Emerson, acid, deep woe, & high laughter, I’ve been so high in my life on pen, so high on the sight of unknown pink cheeks, so high on the barroom laughter of friends, so high on foolish hopes smoked from imaginary pipes, a fool, a clown, an angel, Godd is green, grows from the ground, *all is mud, all is mud uncertainty*—

Along Carnal Street, Dead with Joy

*Lights glow, flow, flash, fling: Yes!
They have blown me aloft, made me a shimmy
I am a humming light, a dancing ray
Brother to the pine, the pulse, joy, every woe
Glow, flow, flash, fling: Yes!*

*Random chunks pass by: metal & flesh
I see the wind rise up, brush souls
I see the wind touch skin, offer kisses of hope
I hmmm, I dance, I wish them all well.*

* * * * *

November

*“I’d love to turn you on.”
—The Beatles, 1967.*

Today’s trajectory was toward acid; nothing else really mattered. I wanted to trip—and did tonight. Spent the afternoon reading my recent acid notes, poems, looking for what was going on with me, what patterns emerging, what becoming—starting to shape them into writings



I'll submit to my workshops no matter how poorly they are received—nobody seems to care what my work *is about*, just that my poems lack titles, & I don't seem interested in figuring out what sells these days.

*"What are they about?" they keep asking.
Acid, music, metaphysics, & pussy," I answer, with a helpful smile.*

Went over Hartlee's house, got high as hell, but wanted acid, shy to ask, did, he was fine with it, preferred mushrooms this time for himself, we launched in—

Listened to the strangest records, room danced & shimmied, wondered about Art & what's its point. Realized how big the gulf between people like me & Hartlee & most others. I complained to him about my writing workshops that seemed more like test markets for selling writing than anything about beauty, wisdom, mystery.

What did LSD teach me this time? Preliminary conclusion: my Art is precious & vulnerable & *losable*. Also: you must give to receive, person by person, everyone you can. And: when alone, *invest*. When not alone, *invest*. *Praise everything, despite*.

These are lessons vast & deep, will take me forever to work with.

So fuck it if I'm poor, lonely, navel-gazing over my flaws. Noone at Emerson is going care if I stop writing. Feeling lousy, pursued, fucked up or whatever, I *must* defend what is *mine*. If my writing doesn't represent me well, nothing else will. No other way to do things but the best one knows how.

* * * * *

December

"Psychedelics are illegal not because a loving government is concerned that you may jump out of a third story window. Psychedelics are illegal because they dissolve opinion structures and culturally laid down models of behavior and information processing.

They open you up to the possibility that everything you know is wrong."

—Terence McKenna

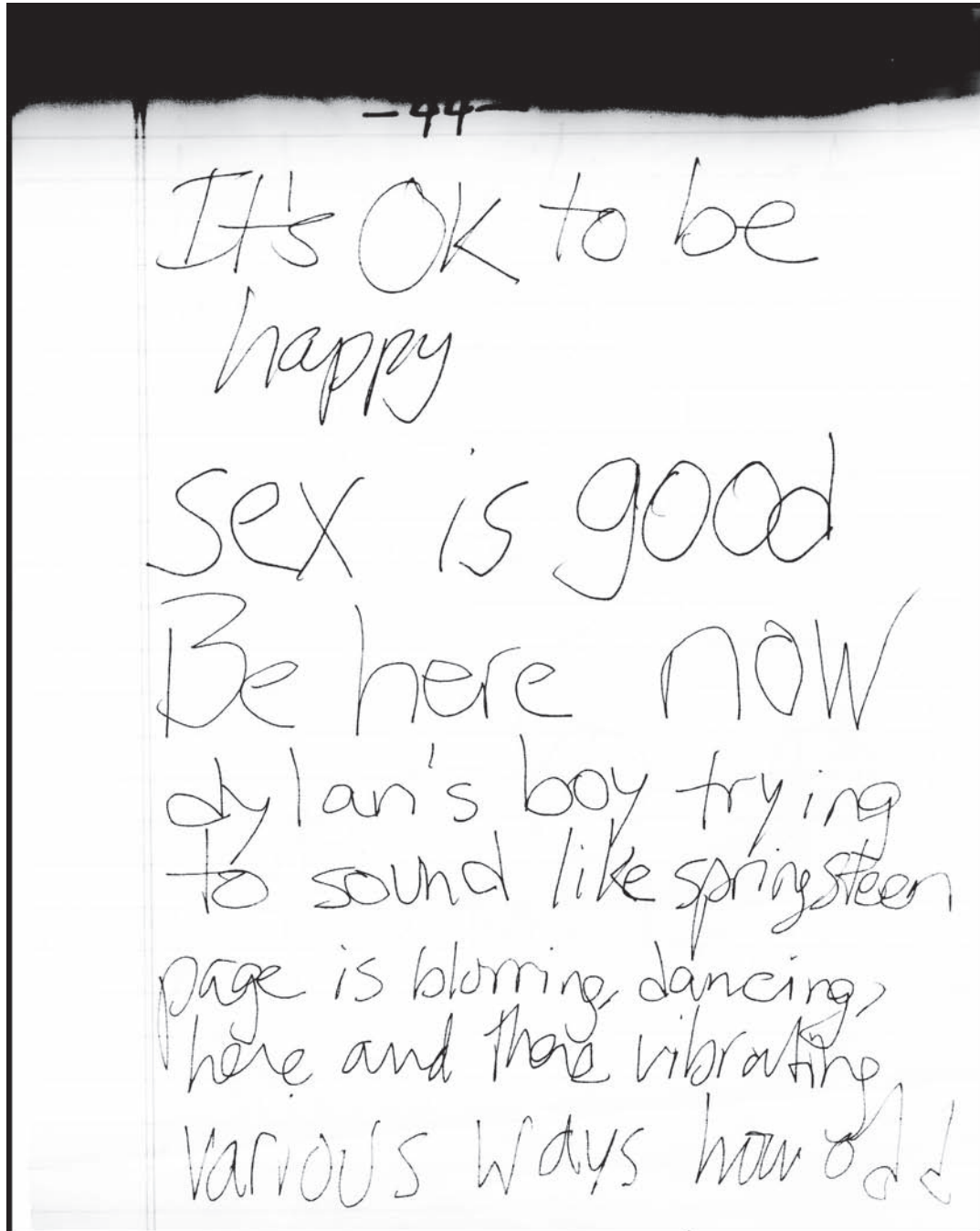
Home. Past 1 a.m. Watching TV all night. *Star Trek: Next Generation*. *Millennium*. *Dr. Who*. *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Now for first completely solo acid trip. My standing lamp has the red light Ric gave me for such nights as this. Incense burning. Window shades to the right of my desk open, lit up tree branches outside. Raining earlier. Shiny night. Put on my pants, keys in my pocket, just in case of . . . something. Sure, I'm a little scared.

Yes's magnificently psychedelic *Keys to Ascension* on my stereo. Notebooks ready. Chewing a piece of blotter. "Masticate, masticate," Hartlee instructed.

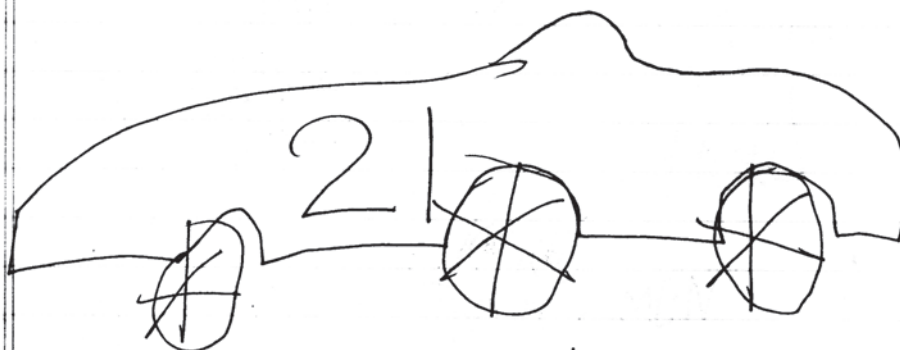
After awhile, the page is red, undulates.

wow, happiness

It's OK to be Happy

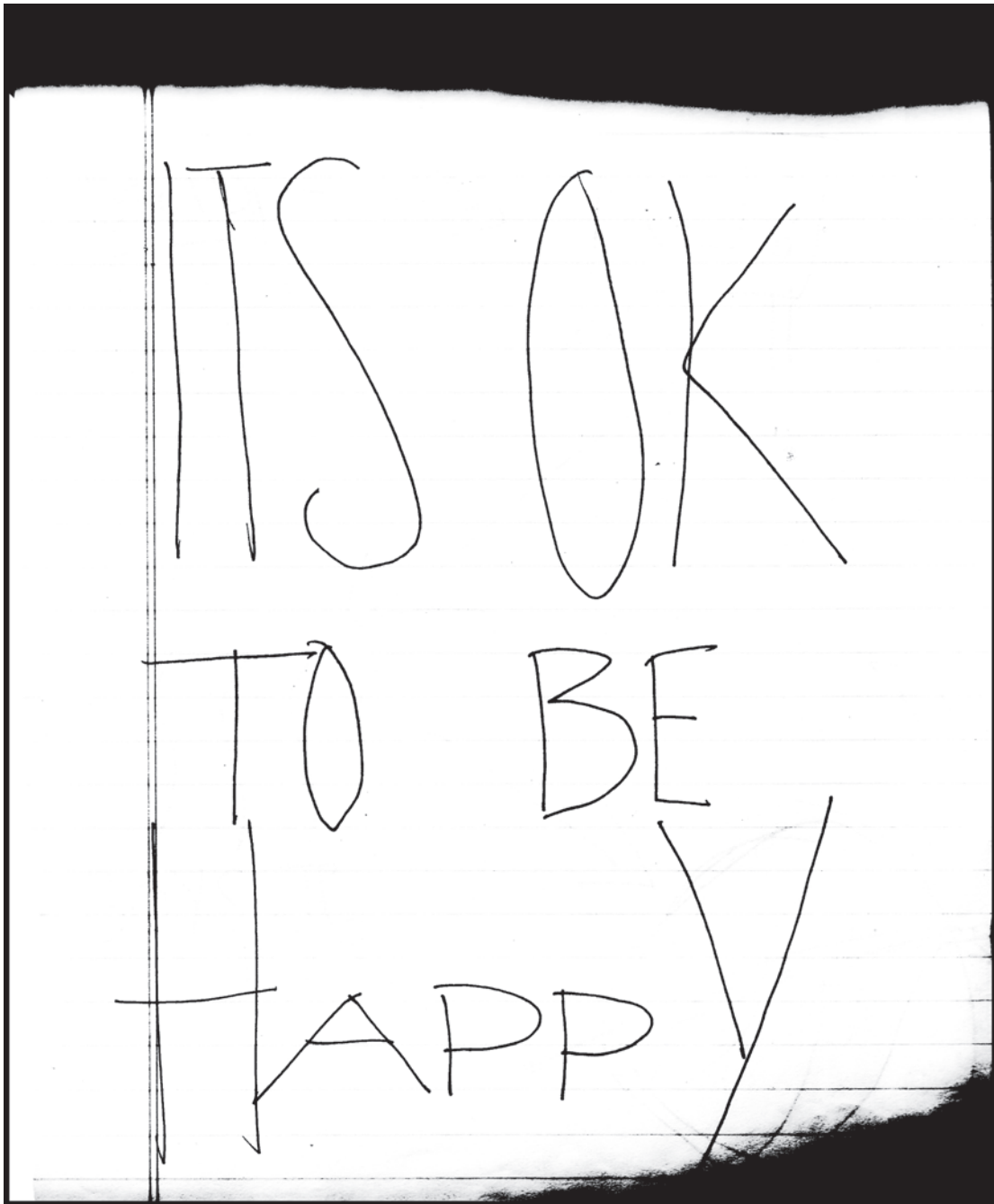


to be writing at
all

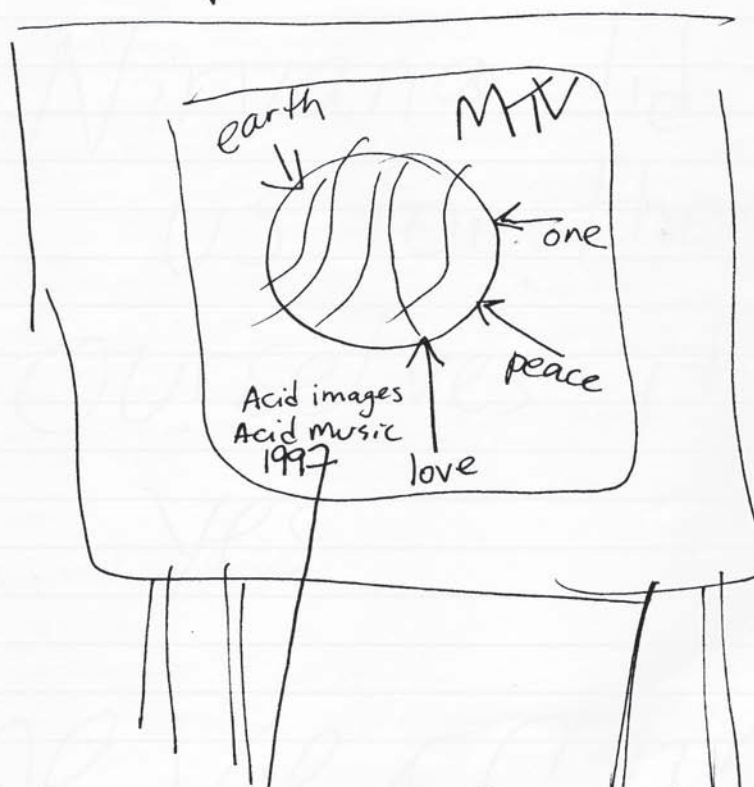


1 2 3 Marlenas

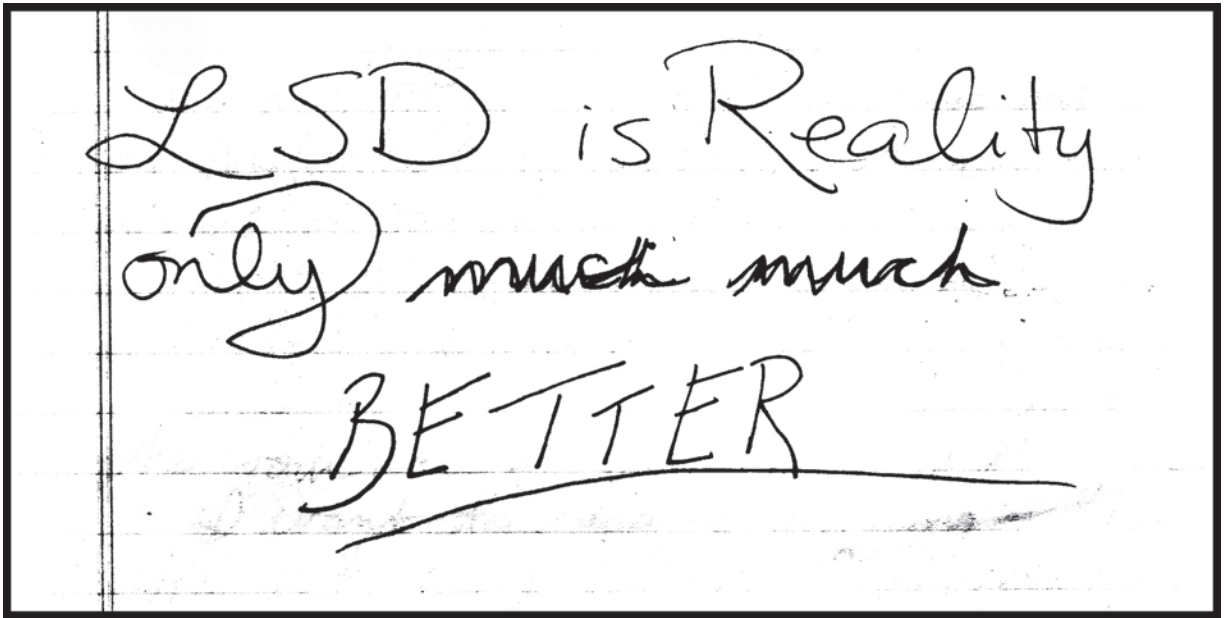
AMONG US



6:47 pm



The music only different
on the surface under
that it's beautiful and
undifferentiated,
BE HERE NOW!



A few days later, an end-of-semester writing workshop party, good riddance to it all, but did find one real friend, like a jewel in the dust, named Joe, writes poems that are unique, strange, exciting, & he came out with me after boring party to ZombieTown to trip. We studied the train tracks running parallel to Carnal Street. The ancient cemetery I daily pass through, the nearby river.

To my studio apartment, to listen to electronic music. He picked up my long-unused guitar, started banging out Bob Dylan tunes. Restless, he left at dawn. We hugged, felt bonded in the unique way trips seem to create.

This semester of writing workshops taught me, among other things, that I *could* function in literary Mainstream America—but *I don't want to*.

I think I'll do better with the publishing classes I've signed up for next semester. Maybe I'll learn better how to use *The Cenacle* as a way to offer of myself to the new kind of community I am seeking, a safe, encouraging place for sometimes hard, sometimes weird, but *meaningful* Art. A vehicle for spreading the word of the new tribalism I'm sure is out there.

"*It's OK to be Happy*" is scrawled on the old chalkboard in a corner of my studio apartment. An acid revelation. But how? I'm still trying to figure that out.

I don't know. Furthur. Somehow. *All is well & divine*. I'm still learning this.



The
Cenacle **23**
December 1997



*Christmas Eve in the
Cardiac Parlor*

Featuring new work by:
Amante, Brannon, Burke,
Emerson, & Soulard



Tamara Miles

How to Draw the Earth

Draw a candle within a circle,
 a match with which to light the candle,
 a man holding the match,
 woman blowing out the match,
 dog on a rug observing.

The dog jumps up and runs around
 in the circle, knocks the woman down,
 the man confused, chaos,
 darker. Scratch the pencil across
 the page, heavy lines swirling,
 circle on fire.

Water to put it out,
 more water. Let your thoughts
 be blue, blue-green, algae,
 coral reef. On the shoreline,
 houses. You inside one,
 a temporary dwelling,
 drawing by candlelight
 an earth-like planet.

Dog outside leaps through
 water. Jellyfish, shark,
 whale, octopus, Amelia
 Earhart's plane circling,
 looking for a place to land,
 a desert island,
 an S.O.S.

Over there, a glacier or two,
 mountain, wise man
 at the top using
 his last match
 to build a fire.

Warm your hands.

* * *

Ephesus, Tonight: One Show Only

On stage, where volunteers
had strung from the ceiling
seven stars,

John the Elder swallowed
the opening act, first
rolled slowly into a scroll,

the sweetest spoken word
he'd ever tasted.

On his tongue a
seed grew, watered
with potato-vodka
until a flower of truth
had sprouted,

and from a
seasoned microphone,
shrouded by seven shining
candles,

the prophet
shouted lines
from Kafka until the whole
holy secret
was revealed,

and a seven
trumpeted choir followed.

Not a drop of blessed
wine was wasted.

and after this,
not a single sinner
doubted.

* * *



Not the Pilot, but a Drone

My friend has prostate cancer. He's depressed.
Today, I cover his English class.

A person who has never had cancer, like a person
who has never been gay, or homeless,
or has never been shot down in a plane over Iraq
and ended up missing an arm and a leg, or has never divorced
or had an affair, or been born a Muslim, a Mormon, or a Jew,
cannot possibly understand the associated conflicts.

His father was a pilot. He's from a small town,
loves his wife and his dog. He's a damn fine poet,
a loyal friend. On certain nights we've gotten
drunk and listened to Dylan Thomas' sonorous voice
go on and on about a girl who should never fear,
never fear the wolf in country sleep.

I've had precancerous cells, a biopsy or two,
procedures, my cervix removed for good measure
in the hysterectomy, but I didn't lose my curly hair,
spend days with my bald head over the toilet,
pray that South Carolina would for godssake legalize
medical marijuana so I could get an appetite,
but I have experienced profound depression
with its sickening reckoning, a tidal wave of constant
sorrow so that it's hard to breathe much less go to work
or give anybody the love he or she deserves.

After 9/11, the wife of a man captured by camera
as he tumbled through the air from one of the towers
was furious at the suggestion he jumped.

“He would never commit suicide,” she claimed.
She has never, I bet, felt the brutal heat and threat
of burn, lungs full of smoke and chemicals, people
screaming, dying, all around her an apocalypse,
and found herself before a window where, thank God,
thank the angels, there is oxygen—crisp, clear,
magnificent O₂.

If my friend ever needs oxygen, I pray
he gets it in abundance.

Having never had to hold my breath
for the latest news about whether I will live
or die, my job is not to empathize but to remember
we can’t smoke near the tank.

For now, I’ll grade his papers, and breathe in,
breathe out. Never, my darling, fear the wolf
who threatens to huff and puff and blow the house
down. This house is made of strong brick. Smoke
goes on rising from the chimney.

My friend’s plane takes off.

* * *

Unnatural

You sound hoarse,
said the ear, nose, and throat
doctor as he examined
my broken nose,

the result of my automobile
curling off the road
into a concrete culvert
around five in the morning

when I was too sleepy
to be driving and my face
hit the steering wheel
or maybe the windshield,

I don't remember,
but the blood flowed
until a nice man came
out of his house

and told me to hold my head
back and squeeze my nostrils
and try to be calm,

and I clutched the hand
towel in which the blood
had pooled itself
into the shape of a small
island.

*But anyway no, this
is my regular voice,
I said to the doc then,
embarrassed,*

but he would have
none of it, said he'd better take
a look, open wide.
I was obedient.

*Wow, he said, you have two
exactly matching compressions
on your vocal cords. Hmm,
he continued, I guess
you're right, I guess
this is just the way
you were born.*

Wouldn't it be nice
If it could be that way
For everybody?

Just a quick listen to the vocal
cords, a quick look down
your throat,

would make it perfectly clear
that this is just the way
you were born?

* * *

Sacred Geometry

In the geometry of our love,

I thread myself into your theorem,
its synopsis held tight in your throat—

across your proud octagonal heart,

eight sides to our every argument,
all logic cast aside for pure art,

the matter decided by our shapes,
properties, relative positions—

by the lines we draw around ourselves,
by the dark space that keeps us
apart.

* * * * *







The Noosphere as Collective Consciousness on Earth

[Essay]

If one accepts the notion that there is a non-local consciousness—that the non-local correlations discovered by quantum mechanics are, in fact, real, and constitute a kind of suffusing matrix or network of connections between every point and every other point in the universe and potentially also the multiverse—, then it is not a stretch to assume that there is a collective mind operating on Earth.

This collective mind operates both locally and universally. The local orientation exists because Earth is specially attuned to itself—signals generated in one Earth entity are decoded easily in the identical or like equipment in other Earth entities. You merely have to tune in or become aware through some event.

This phenomenon ties into the larger network because it is self-same; it is just that the signals from deeper in the multiverse are alien, and decidedly more on the periphery, as compared with the immediacy and familiarity of terrestrial affairs.

When one becomes aware of this collective mind operating on Earth, it is unmistakable, and the observer harkens immediately back to any mysticism, or perhaps Eastern religious notions, she or he has picked up in the course of time. One may begin to question it as the memories fade, but one never forgets it, and is never quite at peace with the somnambulant state of the planet with regard to these matters.

This envelope around the Earth's biosphere is called the *noosphere*, and comprises the totality of the non-local quantum network of consciousness—for our purposes, in the vicinity of Earth. When a tipping point has been reached, we will achieve a new level of evolution through a quantum jump in the collective mind of the noosphere.

The tumultuous events of the 1960s were a false start in achieving this shift. But they were not random, and they were not accidents—they were evidence of a strategy evolution must employ to achieve this necessary mutation. Evolution is not perfect, and its methods are often coarse, so we had precisely what one would expect: a premature form of the mutation that resulted in relatively little.

But if Earth keeps trying, and gets better at engineering these waves, so that eventually the momentum creates a lasting change, the mechanism will have been a success—one in a long line in the history of evolution on this planet. The noosphere is pregnant. One day, in the not too distant future, there will be a profound transformation of all life on planet Earth.

In the noosphere, all consciousness—humans, animals, even plants—and that of Earth itself—is linked into a collective, unified network that envelops the entire biosphere. Many mystics and psychonauts have reported tuning into this array, and sensing a unity that exists at a more fundamental level than the everyday.

For example, you could be at a good party and observe that all of the partygoers are behaving according to a rhythm that is somehow common to everyone there, yet is normally beneath the surface. Everyone is him- or herself, but there is a current guiding everyone's behaviors, and all are in some kind of active union.

When the planet awakens to itself, God only knows what it will be like. And the individual and the collective will be one.

The noosphere is real. It comprises, fundamentally, a pool of the energies of all the beings on Earth, and it is observable. It is a conscious multiverse of individual minds bound together, collectively, in a strange, but perfectly real, organism of neurological space.

Eventually, Earth will awaken to its potential, and to the now-hidden truths of existence waiting for us farther down the evolutionary chain.

Our future depends on its successful evolution.

* * * * *



Colin James

Obtuse Traditionalism

There is something huge living
under my tool shed.

Flattened down grass precedes
a cavern-like entrance.

No sightings yet although
my neighbor has seen the bushes move.

His vigilance is encouraging,
& the motion detector I had installed.

We may have pictures soon
to inundate the Internet. Speaking
into a microphone, of course.

The entrance gives off an odor of musk,
some gland or fistula gone rampant.

It keeps the curious away,
who pester in theoretical camouflage.

An expert has predicted a sinkhole down there,
that ancient river running beneath all of us.

Her idea is to descend,
when stability is finally confirmed,
& facilitate an historical provenance.

* * *

The Euphoric Hair Bombardier

The captured have become
increasingly less adventurous,
walks shortened to the obligatory.

Our gestures have almost succeeded
in containing them. The simplest
central emphasis has them grabbing
for their heads with their hands,
searching for a wave or a swirl.

Mistakes were made, hats employed,
then discarded, like transgressive brilliantine.
Hair Command immediately banned any comb,
brush that is not essential to our work.

Hierarchy hopefully will be restored
instinctively before we all dye.

* * *

Unusual Obsessions and Their Correct Pronunciations

My father, the avid cyclist,
attempted to ride around the Earth
on his bike, backwards.

It got a bit tricky climbing the Alps.
Right of way confused him. His hand
signals, in turn, shocked The Hague.

Shared the road with the less devout,
the better parade. He had neck surgery
in Poland, his profile forever changed.
He began to resemble Mr. Potato Head.

Despondent, he jumped off the largest
single arch bridge in the world.

It was the way down he craved.

* * * * *







Hartley's Righteous Rants

But the heat came round and busted me for smiling on a cloudy day.
—The Grateful Dead, “The Other One,” 1968.

LSD & State Power

Oh, LSD, ol' chum. They hate you and fear you. They use weapons and torture and all manner of warfare against you. The War on Drugs is all about you. You're *the* drug in sex, drugs, & rock 'n' roll. You're that thing, that indefinable force, that substance so powerful and threatening to the mainstream world that a war on innocent civilians, indeed even on their own families, must be waged *ad infinitum*.

Coercing a person into selling an agent a hit of acid, which results in that person spending decades in prison, is totally sick and disgusting. This happened recently at the Firefly Music Festival in Delaware, and at the Lockn' Festival in Virginia, among many others, but it's been happening countless times for decades.

Why? How many innocent lives will be destroyed by the powers of the State in a needless and disgustingly criminal attempt to control the minds of governed? In blatant violation of our inalienable rights to liberty?

Why is LSD worth the State destroying promising young lives over a single dose? Why coerce some kid into taking five bucks for something he wanted to give to you for free? Because those in charge need an enemy within to create, and to justify, and to sustain a Police State. Best to pick a popular item to eradicate—like table salt or Styrofoam or CO2 or light bulbs or LSD. This way it's nothing personal. It's the LSD they want.

But if you are the person containing the LSD, then suffer all pains of hell because the State says the thing is a crime unto itself, and therefore you are a criminal as an accessory to the existence of the thing itself. Unless it is in the custody of the State, in which case it's perfectly fine.

* * *

Some words here for newcomers to LSD. I read on a drug analysis web site that there are some blotters out there containing hits of 200, 300, 400 micrograms (mics) each.¹ Doses of LSD over 100 mics is very irresponsible to distribute; I'd call it reckless endangerment. Why put so much on single hit when sixty mics would be expected? Either the person doesn't know how to lay sheets or they are mad.

But, because the overdosed blotters are all different, and from different places around the globe, I think we are possibly looking at a DEA-type of group making potential overdose blotter. I say this because it just isn't done by responsible people. It's just not economically rational, and is really bad karma, which is a big deal in Acidland.

As long as blotter is consistently weaker than it was in the 1960s, everybody wins. More money is made, and no one freaks out like back then from overdoses. Even someone not knowing acid from Xanax would be OK.

So why are 300 and 400 hundred mics blotters being made? Because there are entities that would love to see those old scare headlines from 1960s again, of people having bizarre and horrible accidents, whacked out of their minds, twirling naked down the street. Those entities that want to see

people harmed by LSD are likely purveyors of these overdose blotters.

* * *

LSD is a catalyst. The CIA knows this very well. Nobody knows how much LSD was smuggled into Eastern Europe during the decades of Communist occupation. It was a huge amount. The CIA loved LSD, and they loved the Grateful Dead because the live audience recordings they allowed of their shows were free of ownership or copyright.

How many live Dead tapes were smuggled into Czechoslovakia and other Eastern Bloc countries? A huge amount. Why did we Deadheads volunteer to help do that? Because it was proof of freedom and joy and fun. The more crowd noise, the better. Hearts and minds.

The Soviets tried to ban cassettes because of it. So it was working. Good ol' blotter acid and Dead tapes made a lot of young people turn on to a better reality, and Marx and Lenin went down the toilet.

Now they want us behind a new Iron Curtain. They want to start another acid scare with their overdose blotters. It's coming but this time we know it's coming.

Long live the human race in peace and freedom.

Endnotes

1. http://www.ecstasydata.org/results.php?start=0&search_field=substance&s=LSD

* * * * *



Judih Haggai

magnolia petals
silently fall
new phase of beauty

* * *

between the spaces
all that cannot be said
a life of its own

* * *

today, tomorrow
such lovely abstractions
this breath is now

* * *

so many
walk this path
today i choose how.

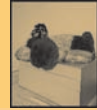
* * *

wanna change the world
wanna change myself
wanna change

* * *

these words:
we are versions of the same thing
let's help each other

* * * * *



Bags End Book #6: The Grand Scheme of Liberation! Grand Finally!

This story and more Bags End writings
can be found at: www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf

Hello Cenacle readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

On Toward the Season of Lights!

The good thing about this long story I have been telling is that I know it has a happy ending. I will say this now because I have decided that some stories have parts in their middle that are more important than their ending, & this is one. Sure, things changed between the start & the end, but I must tell all the story till then & not miss any of it until it's told & over.

So it was last night in my musician friend's Rich Americus's house in the City, & he was just home & sitting next to his daughter Rebecca, who was under her blanket on the big old green chair. He put me under her blanket into her hands where she holded me nicely.

Rich said, "Hi, beautiful."

"Hi, Dad," said she.

Bags End News
 No. 265 November 18, 1995
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

On Toard the Seesun of Lits!

The gud thing about thiz long
 storee I hav bin teling is that I no
 it haz a hapy ending. I wil saye
 thiz nowe becuz I hav desided
 that som storees hav parts in theer
 midel that ar mor important than
 theer ending an thiz is wun. Shur
 things changd between the start
 an the end but I muzt tel awl
 the storee til then an not mis eny
 of it untill itz' told an ovr.

So it waz lat nit in Rich
 Amerikuses hows in the Citee an
 he waz jest horn an siting nekt
 too his dautsy Rebekeh who waz
 on a big old green cher.
 me un'er her blanket int

Bags End News
 No. 266 November 25, 1995
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Viziting the Seesun of Lits with Rich Amerikus!

I hav bil too the Seesun of
 Lits befor. It iz a plas but it
 iz a fim to. An a holliday too
 boot. The lits ar pretty an rol'll
 around lik watr. I dont' no whiy it
 hapens but I hop it alwee deez.

I dont' think that evr befor
 did I go too the Seesun of Lits
 without lots of Bagzard gys. This
 tim I was with Rich Amerikus an
 hiz dautsy Rebecca an theer
 waz Shlela Buny to eksept we
 didnt reelly tawk much too eech
 uthr lik ozvel.

Mostley I lissend too Rich an
 Rebekuh an I gessed Shlela did to.

"Did you sleep well?"

"No."

"I thought you liked my old chair!"

"I'm sorry, um, about us fighting. That's why."

Rich made Rebecca's blanket warmer & more comfy around us, & hugged us both. Then he stood up & said, "I know you want to know about me when I was your age. It sort of obsesses you. You think you should know, that it's kind of your right."

"Dad, I--"

"Well, you're right. I'm all the family you've got. My life is your heritage. I just haven't known how to start."

"Do you now?"

"Do I what?"

"Do you, um, know how to start now?"

"Yes, I think so. I walked around the City 40r hours today, more hours than in a long time. I saw it as it is both now & then. An I saw me, what I am, more clearly today than in years. I realized that I've been scared to tell anyone what I want to tell you."

Now all this people-folks talk flustered me, & I wondered why Rich didn't just tell about the library & the statues & all. He didn't tho. Secretly, I felt glad I had been there 4or those things cuz right now I was feeling sorely left out & 4orgotten.

"Why were you scared?" Rebecca asked.

"Because they've all gone away. It makes no sense right now. I'm tired from thinking & walking. I'm tired from knowing what I should be telling you & being too scared."

Rich stopped talking & picked up Rebecca & me & the blanket & carried us into her bedroom. He set us down softly on the bed & made a kiss to us through his fingers from the doorway.

He talked again. "Think you'll be able to sleep, beautiful?"

"I don't know."

"Good night."

"Good night, Dad."

Rich closed the door. Rebecca picked up this book she was always reading & hugged it to her chest. It had a picture on its cover of a girl who looked a little like her.

She didn't sleep this time tho. She was real quiet holding her book & all.

I rested next to her belly in the dark & this time it was me who falled asleep.

Next thing I knowed it was morning & I heard Rich's voice talking to Rebby. I listened from under the blanket.

"Hi, Dad."

"Hi, beautiful."

"Is today still the day?"

"Yes, love."

"Can I bring my Suzy Clemens book & my art-things?"

"Yes, love."

"Will you bring your guitar & sing songs for me?"

"Yes, love."

"An maybe we'll go to Luna T's Cafay tonight & see, um, old Mister Knickerbocker & everybody?"

"Yes, love. Now listen, I'm up & ready. So you've got to get a move on. I will be in my armchair waiting."

"OK."

"O & Rebby?"

"Yes, Dad?"

"Bring your bunny & beagle friends."

"OK."

"I love you, Rebby."

"I love you, Dad."

"Now get ready!"

"OK."

So Rebby happy rushed around 4or a few minutes getting dressed & I waited. I was wondering about that "bunny & beagle friends" crack of Rich's. Then I seed Sheila Bunny on a table next to Rebecca's bed.

Now what was she doing here?

We regarded each other but Sheila didn't say nothing. I figgered that safety would be found in me being quiet too.

When she was ready, Rebby picked us up & brung us with her to her dad.

We all went downstairs & out the door. It was cold not like be4ore but I guessed this was not the same kind of moment as when me & Rich were going around earlier.

They walked along the City streets 4or awhile but no talking. Then Rich talked some all of a sudden.

"I didn't know how to love. I knew what it was from my memories of my little brother Mickey & how he'd looked at me, but all those silent years since he died buried my skills. Art substituted 4or love in my life."

He swinged Recbecca's hand some & talked more. "You don't have that problem, Beckah. You bring to art your vast love & you bring to love the skills of grace & discrimination art has taught you. You are more dearly precious to more people than you can possibly imagine."

Boy! I wished Ally Leopard was here to help translate for me when they talked!

"But, um, what about you?"

"Me?"

"Dad, listen to me! You're my whole family! But I don't want anymore! Why don't you see how people like you, love you & all?"

"I don't know, love."

Well, at least they weren't mad or fighting no more. I was glad over this part.

We went up some steps & then some more to a place that was all lighted up with celebration. There were people everywhere. I could hardly make out the Season of Lights in this crowd, but I did.

Having Sheila's little body close to me in Rebecca's arms made me feel good. Maybe she knew this is what I needed. She is pretty smart & all.

I have been to the Season of Lights be4ore. It is a place but it is a time too. An a holiday to boot. The lights are pretty & seem to roll around like water. I don't know why all this happens but I hope it always does.

Visiting the Season of Lights with Rich Americus!

So we all walked along close & stuff 4or awhile, just looking at the pretty lights. Then Rebecca talked. "We've never come here the first day before, Dad."

"No. But I came here once by myself on the first day."

"An you didn't bring me!"

"I was 17, Rebby. That was three years be4ore you were born."

"O."

There were lots of people & if Rich wasn't so tall we would have hardly moved along at all. But he was like a tall boat & smaller people around him were water as he sailed us through. Rebecca helded me & Sheila tight & she kept close to her big dad.

He talked some more. "A lot of my life after Mickey died was spent alone in my bedroom. I listened to the radio. I read. I kept to myself even in school, & got into a few brawls be4ore I grew big enough to be let alone."

"You had no friends?"

"No."

I peeked above Rebby's arms to see what was going on. I saw the big pretty tree with the blinking lights that looked like water rolling down it. I saw people-folks with food in their hands & I trembled, but stayed brave when we didn't go near them. I saw a lot of people-folks children, some smaller like Miss Chris, some older like Rebecca, & some older than her too. It was a pretty scene, & noisy with music in the air.

We went through the crowds & then Rich bent over & whispered Rebecca some words. "Rebecca, I was transfixed when I came here that first time & saw the lights. I felt held aloft like in my flying dreams, except that I was awake!"

"But, um, why?"

"Hm?"

"I don't understand! You're not telling me about what it was like to be you when you were my age!"

"I, uh, can't, Reb."

"Why not?"

"Well, I don't really remember. I mean beyond the books & the music & the fights."

"How can you not remember? This is important!"

Now they were mad again! How did this happen? I didn't get it at all. They liked each other a lot but got upset a lot too.

Rich got down to one knee & took one of Rebby's hands so she had to hold me & Sheila in the other one. His face talked to her hand.

"Rebecca, when Mickey died by accident in the barn that day, I did too. I don't think you really understand that. Life or circumstances or whatever took him from me, & I, uh, turned off, I guess. I wasn't like you at your age. I wasn't funny & emotional & in love with people & in love with drawing & all. I was next to nothing, love. Please understand. I was next to nothing."

Rebecca was quiet but I almost felt her thinking hard like Sheila does sometimes. Then she talked.

"Is there more?"

We all walked on.

Now, Dear Readers, this all was too much. I had been quiet 4or a long time, but mah patience & mah understanding were both pretty low. So I talked.

"Hey, Rebby, how come you got so mad?" I whispered.

"It's nothing," Rebby whispered back.

"Back off, beagle," Sheila growled at me.

But this wasn't Bags End & I wanted to know. "No!" I whisper yelled. "Listen, I am here 4or a reason & I have to do it. Rebby, what do you want your Dad to do?"

Rebecca looked up to her big Dad & I knowed she was thinking "I love you" thoughts.

"I want to know what you were like then," she said to him more then to me.

Rebecca said all this & then something happened which had happened be4ore in Cement Park. This pink air came & spread all over everything & things got strange. Well, stranger.

But it wasn't the strangeness of talking statues this time. O no. Not even the weirdly familiar in this story. No sir.

Rich Americus got younger & younger is what happened, till he started looking like Miss Chris's own brother Ramie who is about 17! The waves of pink left him looking not hardly a bit like Rebecca's dad!

Hop out of that throne, Sheila! Confusion is King now! Just kidding, fella.

So skinny young Rich Americus & Rebecca with me & Sheila kept walking till we got to this big gray rock tower looking like a 4-sided finger, or maybe crayon, pointing at the sky. It had a clock on each of its 4 sides, but round dots where numbers usually are. I have a hard time with clocks anyway.

There were benches on all 4 sides of the tower. Rich moved close to the side farthest away from all the people we passed, & kneeled down. He bowed his head & closed his eyes.

Rebecca went close to him but didn't say nothing. I think she didn't know what to do.

Suddenly Sheila pushed Rebby's arm some to get her attention. An Sheila talked too but not grumpy like be4ore.

"Rebecca, I think this is what he wants to give you. This is when what he is now began. Act without worrying about it. What do you want to do right now? Do it!"

Rebecca was quiet. Then she talked. "I want, um, him to tell me what's happening to him. I want to be with him. I want him to see me. I want to be what he didn't have after Mickey died, be4ore other people came."

Rebecca touched Rich on his shoulder & he jumped all scared a bit. His eyes looked funny. Pink & cloudy.

"Hi," he said, all nervous.

"Hi," she said. "I'm Rebecca."

"I'm Rusty," he says.

I can't tell you, Dear Readers, how confused I felt at this point in this long story!

Further & Further into the Strange

"How are you?" Rebecca asked the young Rich Americus.

Rich smiled & got off his knee & stood up, as tall as always.

Sheila whispered Rebby, "Don't be afraid. It will be OK."

Now I talked too. "He's gonna be your dad someday, Rebby. An he's gonna be a certain way then that you don't understand. This is your chance to know him better."

Now what did I mean? Did we time travel or something? Did Rich time travel? What? What? What?

Then I saw that Ramie-looking guy nearby, the one writing in his notebook me & Rich saw during our walk. Oh yah. I remembered that I was in his story too & so I would say strange things sometimes.

But Rebecca nodded to me like I had said something smart. She sat on the bench & Rich sat next to her & me & Sheila in her arms.

Bags End News
 No. 267 December 2, 1995
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Ferther an Ferther intoo the Strang

I Kant' deescrib too yu, dear
 reeds, howe lawst I felt at
 thiz poynt in the long storee I
 hav bin teling yu. Theer I waz
 with Shlela in Rebekeh's arms in
 the midel of the Seesun of Lits
 looking at a Rich Amerikus not
 hiz own tall age but Ramys much
 shorttr wun! An too bee evin mor
 Konfoosd he had jest sed hiz nam
 waz Rustee.

"Howe ar you? asks Rebekeh too
 her yung Dady.

Rich smild an got awff hiz
 nee stood up az tawl az alwez.
 Pa wisperd Reby, Dont' bee
 it wil bee OK."

Bags End News
 No. 268 December 9, 1995
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Sutenlee in a Ally in the Citee

Wel wel we wer in som old
 plas an tawking an then we
 wer in a ally evin tho our legs
 had not moovd us a step.

It waz me an mah big skery
 sortuf pal Rich Amerikus an allso
 nis MisChreeslik Rebekeh hiz datsy
 an theez uthr big gys whooz namis
 I dont remembr.

An Richy tawkd som mor. He
 tawkd a hot lot. I lissend an
 lissend an I am going too put heer
 wat he sed but I wont vot for
 me for prezident of undrstanding it.
 At leest he waz hiz uzvell ag an awll.
 "Thiz iz wat it waz reetty lik with
 theoz old men. Awl that Frendee Klub

Rebecca smiled all pretty. "You're gonna think I'm crazy but I know all about you."

Rich looked at her suspiciously.

Rebecca talked some more. "We're kind of the same. We both feel things deep inside. We want to tell them, sort of. I do it with pictures. You're gonna do it with words & music."

Rich laughed a lot. "Music? Me? I can't play anything! I can't sing!"

"But you'll learn! An you do play! You learned piano when you were little."

Suddenly Rebecca's face got all weird & she looked over to that old Ramie-looking guy. She said, "Stop this! This is stupid! This isn't science fiction or something!"

Suddenly Rich was looking like his usual older self & that Ramie-looking guy with the pen & notebook was saying, "You're right."

"What was the fucking point, Soulard?" asked Rich. Hey! That's a bad word in there! And that guy has Miss Chris's tail name too.

"I don't know. I had something going here but it fell apart," said that Ramie-looking guy. Can a toy have a big brother?

"Do you want to know what you missed?"

"Yes!"

"You missed what led me here. The days & weeks be4ore this moment came."

"Where to then? You tell me?"

Rich Americus looked away from that Ramie-looking guy & at Rebecca. His look was so nice I got all shivery. He talked some more.

"We need to see the Wits," he said.

I had given up understanding any of this anymore.

Suddenly we were in a quiet room of a big house or something. There was another room in the house that wasn't quiet at all!

Me & Sheila were in Rebecca's arms & so couldn't see very much. Rich starts to explain.

"I don't really know anymore how much of it was real & how much of it I imagined out of a book."

"Is this a place you came to then?"

"No, Reb. It's a place they came to. It's called the Friendly Club. It existed in the City 200 years ago."

"Is this, um, what it looked like then?"

"I don't know. I never pursued it much. I just liked the idea when I read about it, these writers meeting here weekly to talk about books & politics."

There was quiet then & me & Sheila both nudged Rebecca enough to get put on the table where we could see. Now there were these other people-folks there too.

"Who are those guys, Rebbby?" whispered me.

"They're my dad's friends. The one with the blonde ponytail is Dylan. The one with the moustache is Chris. They both work with me at the Arcadia bookstore & Cafay. I mean they're there a lot, & I work there one day a week. The chubby guy with glasses is Guy. He cooks food sometimes at Luna T's Cafay."

"O no," muttered Sheila.

"O Food! Yuk!" yelled me & I tried to run but Rebecca helded me tight. Wow, she is strong!

That bad chubby guy smiled & said, "Most people like my food. Especially

my extra hot chili."

"Hold on tight," warned Sheila.

"YUK! YUK! YUK!" yelled me. But Rebecca was like a mountain I could not climb off. O well. I noticed the chubby guy had no food with him. But anyway, O! Yuk!

"All this for that dumb pillow," I groused after Rebecca had kissed & hugged me so good that I decided to risk everything & stay.

Rich was all skinny & young again like be4ore. He looked at the chubby guy & talked. "I want to write poetry too, Mister Humphreys. If you teach me how, can I be in your club?"

The chubby guy looked confused but said, "Of course, Rich."

Now Rich looked at the guy with the girl's ponytail & talked to him. "Do you think I can join, Mister Trumbull?"

"Why would you want to?" that fellow said, with Sheila-like grumpiness.

Rich looked upset & looked at the moustached guy. "Mister Barlow?"

This guy had a nice soft voice. "You're as welcomed as any here, Rich, to join & try to become content."

Now I was trying not to notice all the strange names Rich was using, but when he looked at Rebby & said, "And you, Mr. Dwight?" I was upset as Rebby was so she could hardly say, "OK."

Rich smiles weirdly. "I wish they were more like you. They don't really like books, you know. Not like us. So what if you're old & poor? You like me! You treat me nice! You're going to teach me how to write poetry!"

Rich's face got weirder. It shook & frowned & smiled & groused. Then his head went into his arms on the table. "I'm so sorry. I'll make it up to you somehow. I will. I will."

Goodness me. I wasn't liking this people-folks stuff much anymore.

Suddenly in an Ally in the City

Suddenly we were in an ally even though our legs had not moved us a step. We were all sitting on crates & big cans, with me & Sheila on Rebby's lap.

Then Rich talked a whole lot. I listened & listened & I'm going to put here what he said, but I won't vote me for President of understanding it all. At least he was back to his usual age & all.

"This is what it was really like with those old men. All that Friendly Club talk was just stuff of my imaginings, books I read, & the kind of friends I wished for.

"They told me stories. One claimed he'd been a lawyer. Talked about things he read in the newspaper & said so many times I'll never forget it, 'Why must time & again the laws of the land be abused? It's a sin!'

"Another talked about his wife who was dead or run off with another man years ago. Described her wide hips. Described the permanent bitemarks she's left on his body. Showed us something on his legs. I was never sure.

"The other one didn't talk as much. He looked at me suspiciously, especially when I didn't want to drink from the bottle they passed around. Night Train, usually. I was afraid of it.

"The other two told me this man was just plain crazy. Said they hung around with him for protection. Said he'd go bizerk if anyone bothered them. I believed it.

"Then one time--"

Rich stopped talking & his face went down onto his chest. He groaned like he was hurt. Rebecca brought me & Sheila closer to him, & those other fellows got closer too. He talked again.

"I'm trying 4or you, Soulard. This is fucking hard," he muttered.

I noticed that Ramie-looking guy with the notebook & pen. "I know. Go on," he said.

Richy got calm again. "One time I go into the ally. I'm sneaky like always. Sacred place."

"He's the only one there, this crazy one who didn't like me. Sez sit, with his look. I sit. Scared shitless."

"Starts singing. An old song. Tells me to join in too."

Rich then started singing in his nice voice. I didn't know the song but it reminded me in a way of how the older guys in Bags End would talk when me & Sheila would sneak out of bed at night & hide to listen.

Those were the days, my friend!
 We thought they'd never end!
 We'd sing & dance, forever & a day!
 We'd live the life we'd choose!
 We'd fight & never lose!
 For we were young, & sure to have our way!

Rich said, "We sang & sang. It felt good. I was afraid someone would hear us & we'd get in trouble. We didn't. I 4orgot to be afraid. I sang & sang with this crazy man. He was wonderful. AAAAHHHHHHH!!!"

Now Rich stood up in the ally & let out this long howl of sadness. Rebecca held me & Sheila a little tighter, but I think that like Richy in his long ago story, we 4orgot to be afraid. Anyway, nobody ran away.

I was glad when Rich sat down again & talked in his regular guy voice.

"We never did it again. He never even told me why we did it. Maybe he was blind drunk. I don't know. Maybe he was sober. My life didn't change the next day or anything. I think I even forgot about that singing after awhile. It didn't happen again & I guess I stopped hoping.

"But deep down that day changed me. When I met my band & we sang together, I remembered the good feeling of that day & felt it again. An I realized that it was in art where I would connect with people in my life. Not every time. But mostly. Doing it with others, sharing it with others. Sometimes just others who understood even if they were only spectators."

Rich stoppd talking then. He reached his arms to Rebecca & she was so fast to them I thinked she had wings. But I was lucky to be part of that hug. It was warm & tight & I felt protected from all the bad in the world. Rich left the ally with Rebecca by her hand, & me & Sheila in her grasp, & those other guys followed.

Maybe what happened next was mah fault. Maybe it happened because I got so caught up in all of Rich's stories & sadnesses & big feelings that I 4orgot for a little while why I had come to the City in the first place.

Anyhow, it happened. We went to this place which Rebby whispered me & Sheila was called Luna T's Cafay. She said it was her dad's place & he played with his rock & roll band Noisy Children there sometimes.

We walked through the door & I saw

BARK!

Farmer Jones at the counter on a

BARK!

chair.

BARK!

is what I yelled in Puppy language & couldn't talk English words for a long time. I runned around the place like I was nuts.

BARK! BARK!

It still makes me want to whimper when I remember seeing Jones in Richy's place & all.

BARK!

I runned from all the people-folks there & even Rebbly because I was scared & un-Englished again all at once.

It was Richy who stopped me. He said nice sounds that I didn't know, but I went to him because he was big & strong & his sounds were soft & kind. Or maybe it was because the one thing I knowed that he said was "Sonnyboy," which was what mah longlost Mommmmy Beagle used to call me. Even in the deepest woofs of Dog I don't 4orget her.

Richy stayed far away from Jones when he carried me over to Rebecca & put me in her arms.

She was as close to being Miss Chris or Princess Crissy as I was gonna get there, & pretty close at that. I found mah beloved English words then & the first thing I said out loud was, "Thanks, Richy."

Taking on Big Bad Jones!

Then I saw Farmer Jones panic & try to run away. Rich didn't let him tho. He grabbed Jones around the neck & held him in place. Jones coughed a lot. He is tall as Rich, but not as big. Wearing his usual worn blue overalls & his straw hat.

"I think my little friend has been looking for you," he said quietly, but Jones didn't talk at all.

"I don't know why," Rich said, but Farmer Jones didn't talk some more.

"Maybe I should crack your windpipe to see if any of your reluctant words are stuck in there," said Rich in that dangerous threatening voice I know so well from Sheila.

But I had to stop this. "Don't hurt him, Richy! He has to save mah Pillow friend! And the other Pillows too! An me too!" I yelled.

All of sudden Jones knocked his head back into Rich's real hard, & Rich fell down fast. Jones made to escape but at that moment Luna T's Cafay

Bags End News
 No. 269 December 16, 1995
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Taking on Big Bad Joneses!

Thiz storee I hav bin riting
 haz gon on and on and on.
 But the end of it iz not to far
 away.

I waz held trembley an
 week in Rich Amerikuses' ~~platsy~~
 Rebekehs' arms in that Loontz
 Calay plas of hiz. I waz looking
 at that bad farmer Joneses
 an panikd wen I saw him triy
 too run away.

Rich didnt' let him tho. He
 grabd Joneses arownd the nek an
 held him in plas. Joneses coffda lott.

"I think miy litel friend haz
 bin looking for yu, he s
 but Joneses didnt' tawk

Bags End News
 DOUBLE ISSUE!
 No. 270-271 December 23-30, 1995
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

The Grand, Big Finely, Finely!

I am hapy too reeport too
 mah deer reedrs to grate things.
 Ferst, thiz storee I hav bin
 teling in miy nuwz papr forevr
 it seems iz finely at itz konkluzh
 -un. Sekund, I will no longer bee
 akting weerd bekuz sumwun els
 is riting down advenchurs with me
 in them an saying an nowing stuf
 that I didnt' saye or now. Or
 didnt' desid too saye becauz
 I didnt' no them. Or sumthing.
 Thank yu verree much I am mah
~~one~~ beegel agen.

So I left Rich Amerikus behind
 in the Citee big way of a ~~grate~~ ^{grates}

filled up with pink. It was so thick that nobody could move. It was then I remembered again Princess Crissy's promise that whenever I saw pink it was her promise that I would be safe.

Now it was Sheila's turn to act. Nobody could move except her. Probably because of her magic purple eyes. She hopped from Rebecca's arms, after giving her a little kiss on the cheek, & straight up through the air to Jones's head, & grabbed tight hold of his ear. I thought I saw her nod her furry little head. A moment later she & Jones were gone. The pink was gone too.

But Rich was still on the floor & his eyes were closed. I climbed down from Rebecca's lap & crawled onto Richy's chest.

Everyone gathered around us but not too close. I crawled right up to near Richy's head to see if he was sleeping good or bad, & then I saw he had some marks on his forehead. I licked at them.

Then he opened his eyes, so I talked.

"Don't worry, fella, I am mah classic beagle self again. An I don't like food except one like always. But you saved us & all, & your head is hurt, so I was licking you with the last dregs of Dog in me," said me. An now I was Dog no more.

"Thanks, Algernon," said Rich softly, with hurt on his face.

"Hey! You recognize me!"

"I only know who you are in dreams, don't I?"

I nodded.

"Is this a dream then?"

"I don't know. It's not for me."

"I remember everything now. You live in that fantasyland, Bags End. You write the newspaper. I write one too. Called Galleons Lap, from A.A. Milne."

"I know, pal."

"I've shown up in Bags End sometimes. But you've never show up here."

"I had to."

"Was it that man who scared you? An hit me?"

"Richy, why don't we go to that couch in the back room & I'll tell you," said me, wondering what I was talking about. Then I looked around & saw that old Ramie-looking guy writing fast into his notebook. O yah. I am in his story be4ore I am in mine. O fooley.

Richy brought me to the room I talked about & he slowly lied down on the couch. He put me on his chest so what we could see each other's faces. An we talked.

"I helped you a little cuz you were sad & you have to work hard about your passed," said me.

"Thank you."

"An you helped me get that bad big guy, & now he's being brung back to Bags End where the good big guys will make him restore the Stays-Is he broked."

Richy smiled at me & all mah words.

"You don't have any recent issues of your newspaper with you to help me catch up on all this?"

"Sorry, guy."

"I can explain more or less," said a new big guy in the room.

I hoped he wasn't Farmer Jones's big brother or something, but Rich said in mah earbone that this fella was his real good friend called Jim Real T. I was gonna ask what kind of name was this, & was there any fake T's out there, but Jim talked instead.

"The passing of time was thrown off by that farmer. It was hurried

in the place where Algernon's Pillow friend comes from, where the farmer hails."

I watched Jim's blue-green eyes & liked them. They sparkled like stars. He talked some more. "Your time, Rich, has gotten slower & slower because you've been living more & more in the past. You regret it & can't make a peace with it. That's where the farmer--"

"Jones," speaketh me.

"Huh?" said Jim.

"His whole name is Farmer Jones."

"O. Thank you."

"Sure."

"Anyway, that's where Farmer Jones got the extra time he needed to make it work. He took yours, Rich."

"O" said Rich. Smiling like it made sense. Yah, right.

Jim smiled too. "Actually, none of this makes much rational sense, but my friend Ray writing all this is, um, different. He says he never writes when stoned or bombed, but I don't believe it myself."

The old Ramie-looking guy laughed & said, "Thanks!" to Jim.

"You're welcome, Ray!" said Jim, laughing too.

Different, mah paw! That old Ramie-looking story-writing guy was weird as Bags End! An that's weird first class! But now I talked.

"Richy, I have to go."

"O."

"I hope you're feeling a little better."

Richy hugged me & said, "How will you get home?"

I smiled all excited. "I have a good friend who said this time I could use one of her favorite tricks."

Was this Crissy I meant? What had she sent? Old Ramie-looking guy, again, scribbling & scribbling away.

"O. Well, goodbye."

"Goodbye, Richy," said me, & I smiled tricky, & I was gone from there, & back in Bags End where I belong!

The Grand Finally!

I am happy to report to you Dear Readers two really good things. First, this story I have been telling 4orever is finally to its conclusion. Second, I will no longer be acting weird because someone else is writing down mah adventures with me in them, & saying & knowing stuff I didn't say or know. Or something. I am very much mah own singular beagle again, thank you very much.

I'd left Rich Americus behind in the City by way of a Crissy-borrowed magick tricky smile, & now I was back in Bags End in mah favorite place called Milne's Porch. Sitting in mah comfy armchair.

Nobody else was there & I didn't see anybody through the window that goes to the bedroom I share with mah brother Alexander Puppy.

Hmm. Well. Now what do I do?

I guessed that going to see Sheila Bunny in her Throne Room was a good idea. After all, the last time I saw that terrible Farmer Jones I had chased 4or so long, Sheila was holding him tightly by the ear & disappearing.

So I got out of mah comfy armchair & clumsily climbed through the window onto mah bed inside. I opened mah bedroom door into the Bunny

Family's apartment but, like mah bedroom, it was dark & full of nobody.

So I ambled along through the hallways of Bags End till I got to Sheila's Thone Room. I walked right in & said, "Hello, King! Here I am back in Bags End! How's tricks?"

Bad move. How fool of me to think that even 4or a moment I knowed what was happening around me.

Sheila was slouched down in her throne & had been deep in a nap when I sauntered in. She had a half-chewed carrot (O! Yuk!) in one paw & a Jack Kerouac book in the other. I knowed about the who of that book cuz I seed his picture on it.

Partly waked up, Sheila slowly opened one of her purple eyes. Thinking quickly, I hurried to mah spot in the corner, curled up & pretended to be asleep mahself. I guess this worked cuz Sheila adjusted in her throne a little more, muttered, "Dum beagle," & went back to sleep.

I waited 4or a little while & then on tippy toe beagle paws I skidaddled from that room.

Hmm. Now what?

I decided to go see mah personmommy Miss Chris in her house in Connecticut. It's a tricky way I get there but suddenly there I was.

Miss Chris was in her TV room resting on Suzy Couch. None of her family or even that Toy Tall Boy Ramie of hers were there.

But you know who was there with her? Right under her head upon Suzy Couch?

Betsy Bunny Pillow, that's who!

Just as I knowed this, Miss Chriss seed me & yelled a happy "A-wa-wa!" to me with her hugging arms open. I was having none of it tho. I got kind of crazy & runned back to Bags End really fast.

There I was, in a hallway, breathing hard from running. Down the hall came Mister Owl, the teacher at Bags End School.

"Welcome back, Algernon! See you in school tomorrow!" he said all friendly.

Well, now, at least someone said something about me being gone. But not much.

I wanted answers to mah questions about all that happened. When those Pillows in the Bunny Pillow Free State had said over & over, "Betsy's busy! Betsy's busy!" what did they mean? What had happened to the Pillows with the faces? Where was Farmer Jones now? An was the Stays-Is that Princess Crissy had told me was messed up better now?

That was it. Princess Crissy would tell me about everything. I high-tailed it to the door to Imagianna as quick as mah short legs could go.

Imagianna is a funny place. Sometimes when I have gone there, it seemed like Princess Crissy's Castle was far from the Bags End door, miles & miles. But sometimes not. This time I found it very close.

I decided to be tricky & surprise Crissy. Instead of knocking at the front door, I started running around to the back door, which is never locked. Besides I don't like it when that Boop guy, who looks like a turtle but isn't one, has to introduce me to Crissy with a lot of big, fancy words.

"Algernon! I mean, uh, greetings, Sir! I must congratulate you on your triumphant return to Bags End!" said the Boop I almost runned down around the side of the Castle.

"Hi, Boop. How's tricks?"

"Who?"

"Right. Well, no time to exchange hills of syllables with you. Where's Crissy?"

"She's on that confounded porch as usual! I mean, uh, I will have to announce you of course!" Boop was all upset & confused. I almost felt sorry for him.

Almost. He's littler than me so when I said, "Thanks, pal, seeya in the funny papers," & pushed past him, he couldn't stop me.

Sure enough, Princess Crissy was sitting on the porch she gave me when I was in exile. It's called Beagles Sanctuary but also 1928 Paris. I don't know what that second one means, but I like it better.

"Hi, Crissy!" said me, walking onto the porch.

"Algernon!" Crissy jumped up from the porch's chair to get me & put me in her lap. Then she liked me so much that she had to kiss & hug me. Nice girl.

I saw then that Crissy had been reading issues of mah newspaper.

"Crissy, what none of those Bags End Newses will tell is what happened to Betsy & Jones & the Pillows with faces. That's cuz your humble chronicler here doesn't know," said me.

Crissy looked at me with her pretty smiling face & her long tangled hair.

"So you want me to tell you?"

I nodded.

An she did. At least she told me what she knew, which answered some of mah questions but not all. I listened in her lap while she skritchd mah backbone.

The first thing is that the Stays-Is is back in place. I guess that me helping Rich Americus to live in his own time or something helped that. Sheila did the rest, Crissy told me. Her & her purple eyes got Farmer Jones to give up his plan.

An now Farmer Jones is not in a fantasyland no more. Crissy said when Sheila was done, Crissy herself sent him back to Miss Chris's world.

"What if he finds Miss Chris's house?" asked me.

Crissy looked sad. "He is far away from her house. An he can't go into Bags End unless Miss Chris & Sheila let him."

I asked her how he would survive in Miss Chris's world when it wasn't his own. Crissy's look got dark & scary. "Not very well. But he can't be destroyed."

"I guess you can never get rid of all the bad there is."

"No, Algernon."

As 4or the Pillows with faces, Crissy told me that Betsy had put them in charge of the Bunny Pillow Free State.

"Does that mean she's not King no more?"

"What it means, you frivolous beagle, is that my own kind are now leading & tending my own kind!" said a whispery voice I knowed in mah sleep & hadn't heard in a very long time.

An there arriving in Miss Chris's arms was Betsey Bunny Pillow!

I almost scampered off Crissy's lap to leap up into Miss Chris's arms & give Betsy a great big lick, I mean kiss, but mah fears crowded together to spell the word NO! in mah mind to convince me. Even I know that word.

Miss Chris carried Betsy to our chair & sat down next to Crissy with Betsy in her lap.

"Why did you run away, A-wa-wa?" she asked sadly, while patting my back with one hand & sucking her thumb with the other. O! Yuk!

"I got scared, Personmommy. I don't know why. I am sorry."

Miss Chris smiled her prettier-than-all-creation smile at me & I knowed she liked me again.

Betsy started making that strange growling whispery sound that means she's getting mad. Just like a big guy. She wasn't getting all the attention so she had to make threats.

"So are you still King, Betsy?"

"My State has no King! My State is no longer in chains, full of slaves! My State is free 4or Pillows everywhere to come & live!" Betsy whisper yelled.

O boy. How little some things change. Now instead of talking about Jones all the time, Betsy was probably going to talk about her great State a lot. I could see Sheila getting mad at that.

Now what I wanted to ask Betsy right then was where she had been all this time, & what she had been busy doing, & even how come she had no face.

But what happened was that Princess Crissy & Miss Chris started to fall asleep on the comfy Betsy. It happens a lot. But proletarian souls like your poor old pal Algernon don't get to rest on the soft Betsy much.

So I sneaked away from this sleeping scene & went back to Bags End.

I was frustrated tho because I didn't feel in my beagleboy journalist's heartbone that I had gotten the whole story. Had I tried? Yes! But there was still unknown answers.

Being back in Bags End & things more or less regular should have reassured a habit-loving fella like mahself. An I did like the part when me & that smart girl Lory Bunny would work together on mah newspaper again.

But not enough. I am back & what is left of the story has been told. Except 4or the important stuff that I don't know.

So what will happen now?

I writed those last words earlier today & I & Lory are writing these words right now really fast cuz who came to see us on Miln's Porch but the star of these stories, Betsy Bunny Pillow!

"I am here 4or my interview," she whispered as she bounced through mah bedroom window onto Milne's Porch, & me & Lory skidaddled from mah comfy armchair 4or fear of being smothered.

So here goes:

BEN: How do you like being back in Bags End, Betsy?

BBP: That's a stupid question. Next!

BEN: I guess your Allies are back, huh?

BBP: You dum beagle! Don't you have any good questions? Did you chase my story for nothing?

BEN (getting mad now): OK, Betsy, how come you don't have a face? And what were you so busy doing when I went looking for 4or you in your Free State?

BBP: That's better. I was busy not getting a face.

BEN: What does that mean?

BBP: It means that when I saw what was happening to the other Pillows, I ran into Jones's house to see if I could find a way to stop it. I put the Pillows with faces in the dark because I thought that no sunshine might slow down what was happening.

BEN (gtting annoyed at Betsy acting all important): Why was I captured?

BBP: I didn't know it was you, you dum beagle! All I made sure was that my traps would keep the evil Jones from sneaking back.

BEN: O.

BBP: O what?

BEN: Well, I guess it worked because you don't have a face.

BBP: Don't be so sure, beagle.

The interview stopped right then for just a moment. Betsy revealed to me on the farthest end from her pillow case's opening a sweet little girl's face with pretty pink cheeks & blue eyes the same color as her dress! Her face was very pretty. The only ones I know & love better are Miss Chris's & Princess Crissy's. I was speechless. It was magick.

An then it was gone & Betsy left too, & very quietly Lory Bunny & me climbed back in to mah comfy armchair, & sittid for a long time.

I guess it's possible to get used to anything. Where there was a Bunny Pillow Farm, there now is a Bunny Pillow Free State. Where there was a Pillow with no face named Betsy, there is now a Pillow with a hidden face named Betsy. An the leaders of her native State have faces but have orders never to hide them. Somehow this makes Betsy both a big shot special Pillow guy with a face & a Pillow of her people who mostly don't have faces. How tricky.

But what about all of it? I don't know. In the end, I am a humble beagleboy journalist chronicler of my strange homeland.

Lory left me with a little kiss on my furry cheekbone, & mah hard thoughts to think. I knew who mah next visitor was gonna be because I heard her mutter "Brains," & this had to be Sheila Bunny cuz it was her voice & her nickname for her sister Lory.

Sheila hopped right next to me on mah chair & demanded to be covered with mah earblanket so I did.

I talked fast. "How does this crazy place change but somehow stay Bags End too?"

"I don't know, beagle," Sheila said quietly.

We sat 4or a long time there & didn't talk much more. I think Sheila just wanted mah wordless company & I liked hers too.

I fell asleep in awhile & when I woke up it was dark night, & Sheila was gone.

Alone on mah porch in mah comfy chair. Alone to think about all the crazy things that had happened.

This was what I wanted, right? Quiet & calm & no scary things & no big guys pushing me around, right?

Right. Except not 4or too long. I wanted both & this was the hardest thing of all 4or me to understand about me.

So this story ends here but I sure hope that there will be more, & I even hope a little that they will crazy & be about big tough guys like Betsy Bunny Pillow & Sheila Bunny.

I hope some of them too will be about nice girls like Crissy & Miss Chris. Even that Rebecca girl sometime again maybe.

I hope mostly that I will be there to write them down 4or mah loyal Dear Readers & fans of mah unique home called Bags End.



* * * * *

Tom Sheehan**Photos at Low Tide**

Shoreline crows claim
to own low tidal flats,
gulls cry for mercy.

Flats, like vistas under
glass, show off clouds
rich as bread pans.

A single green buoy
light on rocks dares
mark the channel.

Erect sail masts wait upon
mistress winds, nowhere
to go, nothing to do.

High-porch bound, caught
up with crows, I'm inside
out of self, pulling for gulls.

* * *

Metaphors for Horses

Oft times they're ridden
high, wide and handsome.

At a gallop, booted, bidden,
until choice vittles come,

while riders achieve fame
reaching past the pages.

Rare rides, Arab speed, claim
mostly as drays, free of cages,

fabled to be sure-footed,
they plod their good intents;

slowed in the cadence, rooted,
subject of quick arguments,

they wait spring, river's run,
or the barn, oh, day is done;

prime story or poem consigned,
gone, wrapped within my mind.

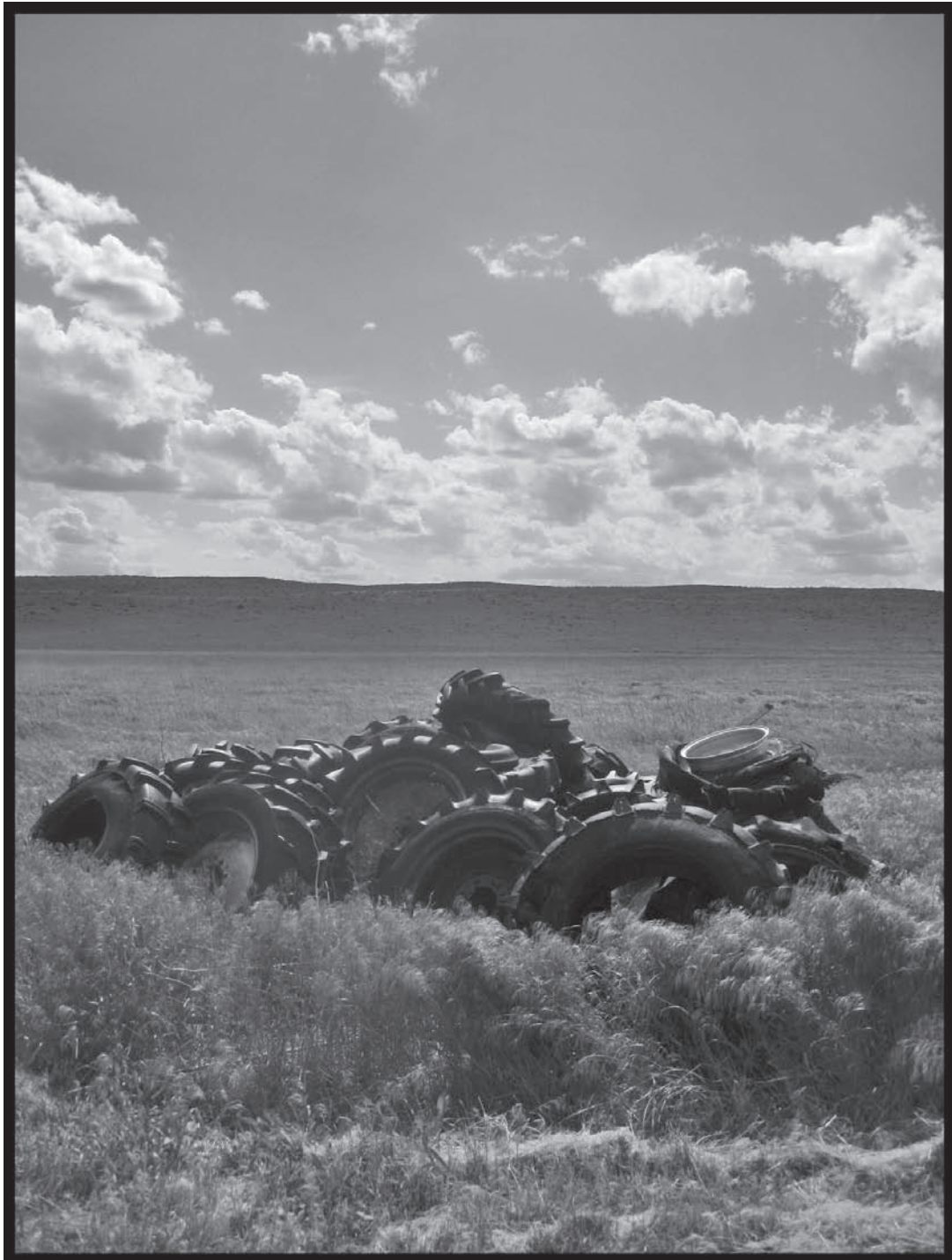
* * *

Clambering

Writing a poem
when the mountain
isn't moving
is the art.

* * * * *







Back in the Forest with You

[Travel Journal]

It's like this: you awaken, flip over, and puke hard into the aluminum pot you placed beside your hammock. A thousand colors explode before your eyes in organic artistic sculptural forms as you roar in Spanish ¡¡¡YES!!! ¡¡¡GIVE ME MORE!!! through your heaves.

Staring into the bright darkness around you are the eyes of six other men: Dave Sternstein, with whom you drank last year; Mark Summerman and Ryder Ferency, two friends of Dave's who came here with him from California; don Joaquín Piaguaaje, your teacher; another Secoya shaman, don Jerónimo Payaguaaje; and Jerónimo's son and apprentice, Manuel.

This ceremony's being held in what Dave calls the "provisional hut," a wall-less, dirt-floored structure roofed with plastic tarps. It boasts a low sleeping platform made of planks, and a gas stove, and a set of crude shelves stacked with dishes, pots, silverware, and food. A shallow trench around the perimeter keeps the floor from flooding in the rain.

You're working on a project that Dave's organizing: building a cultural center for the Secoyas that will double as a house for Joaquín. Half-finished, the larger structure is five meters away. When it's done, there'll be a festival.

But you're not thinking about that now. You're feeling a surge of pity for everyone who isn't having the visions you're having—explosions of the most intense beauty possible, straight from the heart of the universe.

No one has ever experienced such marvels, no one has ever seen what you're seeing now—neither your friends, nor your teacher, nor the prophets and sages of old.

You're becoming enlightened—the next great religious leader sent to humanity.

The only problem is: how will you deal with all the wisdom-seekers camping out on your lawn for some face-time with you?

You can send your disciples to deal with them. *Take a ticket, folks. The master will see you when he's done puking.*

You spit out the last of the yagé, lie back in your hammock, take some deep breaths. In the wake of your soulgasm comes an image of this location in a future some decades hence. In rapidfire Spanish, you expound the vision to the others:

¡When we get off this planet
we're gonna start building genes into new organisms!
 ¡Not because we want to, no!
 ¡But because that's what we'll need to do to survive
on the new planets we colonize!
 ¡And that's when the rainforest
will live up to its economic potential—
as a source for those genes!

¡All these plants and animals
around us now
will become the most spectacular wealth imaginable!
 ¡Secoya rockets will blast off
from clearings in the forest!
 ¡And our descendants will take *yagé* with them
to communicate with the life forms they find!
 ¡This is how humanity will survive!
 ¡¡¡Gentlemen, to the *ships!!!*

Ships! you think in English as you fall silent. *Archaic! Phoenecians! Greeks!*

You slip between centuries on a trireme of time. You consider Greek and Secoya mythologies. In both, organisms transform physically in ways that express their inner nature. Narcissistic Narcissus turned into a flower. Joaquín once told you that the screech-blooming umú birds had originally been people who loved to laugh.

Maybe these tales use metaphor to say that the long-term transformation of a species through evolution reflects the nature of its consciousness. Each species' personality is a way of relating to itself and the environment and, across many generations, affects the composition of the body.

Alternately—additionally?—the old stories could be literally true. That would explain why there are so many similarities between them, so many talking animals, so many metamorphoses. The laws of nature were different then.

Dave said the Secoyas believed all humans came out of a cave in Peru. Other tribes have other origin myths. Western science says humans evolved in Africa. Could the Secoyas be right? Apples don't grow on a tree by starting on one branch and migrating to the others. What if the earth is like a tree that bears fruit in many different places?

This is consistent with the vision you had last year of time being shaped like a tree with multiple roots, each a different origin story.

As you muse, rocking back and forth in a soft darkness where diverse pasts have converged in the present, you reflect that there might be forces in the universe that are smarter than humans are, and might be making things happen in ways that we can't grasp.

And what better way to keep secrets half-hidden than by revealing them only to people who are "on drugs," automatically putting the information into question?

The spirit world keeps its cards close to its chest. Why? You can't figure it out. But since ancient times, the humans engaged in the project of civilization have gradually steered away from the spirit and toward the material. This has led them to advances in science and technology that never would have happened if they'd kept on seeking truth in the livers of sacrificed sheep.

Meanwhile, the traditionalists in their villages went on developing classic arts like ritual, cultivation, dance, hunting, storytelling, conversation, music.

It occurs to you that European pagans used to believe in gods because they were running higher levels of dimethyltryptamine than moderns do. The molecule in *yagé* that lets people see visions is also produced by the human brain. Archaic mythology must've been produced by internal chemical effects that attuned people to the wavelengths of reality at which gods are seen.

the hut, the sky begins to rain drumbeats of drops on the plastic roof, and a swarm of horseflies arrives, filling the air with a vigorous drone. Since you arrived, insects have favored your blood over that of the others, maybe because of all the rich food you ate back at home.

You decide that for once you won't fight them. You'll just let them take what they want and see what they have to offer in return. Everyone's equal here. You have to pretend to be dead, lolling in the hammock, one hand on the ground, before the horseflies will confidently go at you *en masse*. On your back and on your legs they bite you, on your arms and ears. You egg them on. You invite them in. In your mind's eye, you transform into an upscale Italian restaurant, and the horseflies into guests. You see yourself serving them food and wine. "*BITE ME*," you roar in English at one stabbing your right temple. The diners pay with horsefly energy of the most intense yellows imaginable—banana symphony, solar snowstorm, torrent of lemon spheres.

It's closing time. Most of the diners have paid and gone home. You shoo away a few last tipsy customers, wishing them well. You sit up in the hammock and open your eyes. One solitary horsefly, resembling an old Chinese doctor, still wants to work on your legs, and you let it. At least one place where it bites you, on top of your right foot, you know is an acupuncture point. It moves to your left arm now, carefully, intently selecting places to sink its instrument into your flesh. You guarantee it safety and satiety.

Don Joaquín is watching you, a smile playing about his lips. He sees you noticing him, and urges, "*¡Mate, no más!*"—Just kill!

After a moment's hesitation, you obey, and transform the old doctor into a being of pure consciousness, unencumbered by an earthly husk, with a slap.

The crumpled body tumbles into the soft gray ashes of the extinct fire.

* * *

Later, as everyone was taking down their hammocks, you approached don Jerónimo. Like don Joaquín, Jerónimo and his son Manuel had been completely silent during the night. You asked him how he'd liked the ceremony.

"Ehhh, more or less," the old man demurred, stone-faced.

It suddenly dawned on you that you'd been rather loud. "There was a lot of white guy noise, huh?"

Don Jerónimo erupted in laughter.

* * * * *



Ace Boggess

Prison View

First moon in five months
full outside my window
at the Martinsburg Correctional Center
where I've just arrived six hours
from my former jail home.
Same spare walls, spiritless meals,
but new clothes & a new view:
a field of short grass, scrub & dirt
like a nature preserve in Kenya,
vast, unreachable sky, few stars &
moon. I cling to that great dot
in these hardest nights of hardest days.
It warms me with love,
like a faded, broken Valentine,
swears, *I'll see you again,*
I'll wait for you, I will . . .

* * *

The Prisoner's Gospel

Blessed are the broken,
for they carry their justification
with them like a union card.
Blessed are the first offenders,
for theirs is the kingdom of second chances.
Blessed are the unloved,
for they shall suffer
only for themselves.
Blessed are the flight risks,
for they still have places to go.
Rejoice in influenza, medicated,
sleeping away the days. But
woe unto he who has learned to hope,
for his eyes are stained-glass windows
in a crypt &
woe unto husbands
who see their wives
remembering life without them. Yes &
blessed are the broken &
woe unto the broken &
rejoice in the breaking,
for such men find peace in their pieces,
rebuild themselves: a monument
with scars, a book of the Word
with shattered spine,
duct tape keeping its guts
from the cold stone floor.

* * *

Freedom

The color of midnight:
clear & quiescent, scented

with riverbanks, seedheads,
tall grass, life.

Its touch is a woman's,
impassioned & safe

as the sulfur skull
of a foot-long match,

yet sometimes chilly as a lake wind &
covering everything like dust.

It tastes, too,
like charred bacon,

cherries & molasses: a man
would certainly swallow it whole

if he knew its bottle
had a bottom after all.

* * *

“But When They Drop the Bad News on You, Then What the Hell Will You Do?”—David Baldacci, *The Simple Truth*

Say to yourself, *At least it can't get worse*, although it does.
 Your victim shows, curses you with eyes swearing
 your many pretty wounds are glitter glass
 compared with diamonds shimmering in his skin.
 “Twenty-five,” the judge says, while you wonder if that’s days
 or weeks. Then in a few hours or maybe a year
 your lawyer develops cancer of the ear & no longer takes your calls.
 Your friends lose themselves to madness, heroin,
 something else they caught while petting spider monkeys at the zoo.
 By now you’re so exhausted when your wife requests,
 “Let’s separate,” your mind sighs, *Whew,*
we already have, until you figure out she’s not
 measuring space between but what cement she’s using
 for the break. All you can pray as you kneel
 to gather your entrails off the floor
 is, *I hope he’s a priest*, so at least someone might be there
 to pour the shots of liquor at your wake.

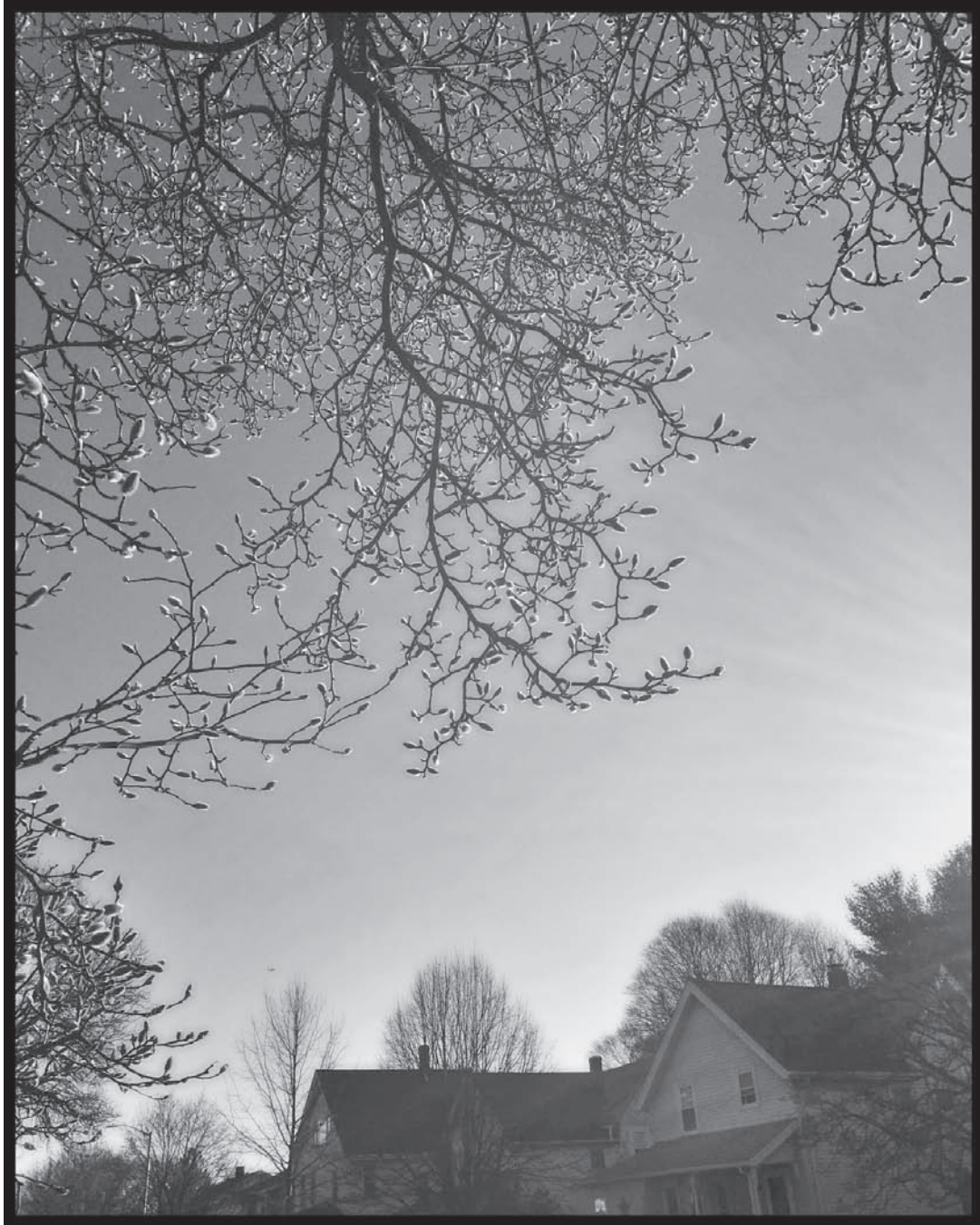
* * *

“Suppose He Wants to Rob—Who Can Prevent Him?”

—H.G. Wells, *The Invisible Man*

From the moment he pulls into the driveway,
 he studies the symmetrical box of the residence:
 two stories of rusty brick & weak gutters,
 rolling windows storm-sealed, door
 strictly double-locked, on the lawn a lady
 crabapple, its short, pink arms not catching the level above.
 He makes himself a burglar in his own bungalow then,
 frustrated, reaches for his key or garage-door remote.
 Earlier, a big cat hidden by heightened panic grass,
 he lurked in a lot at the mini-mall,
 observing the zip-in & shuffle-out of patrons at the tobacconist,
 the pharmacy, the tanning bed & adult bookstore:
 he could take them—one motion, a swift thwack, &
 it's off with a wallet or package containing . . .
 what? *Society doesn't want a grocer who dreams,*
said Sartre, for to the extent he's a dreamer,
he's that much less a grocer. How easily the meek become monsters,
 lacking only the boiling blood of action.
 Such a man might make murder
 in one transcendent vision of himself.
 What keeps him contained behind the old woman
 who lingers too long at the ATM?
 Why does his hand tremble before the carver's fang,
 revolver's booming brimstone voice, the quiet rod or ball bat?
 When night comes, he disrobes with the ease
 of a ritual prayer, creeps into bed & holds his lover—
 sleeping—to his chest as though he's innocent
 beside her. But his head is full of wonder,
 a field of plowed soil sown with possibilities.
 Only once he stirs from rest, gets up &
 goes to check the deadbolt on the door.

* * * * *





Prostate Panic

[Prose]

Continued from Cenacle | 99 | April 2017

ix. Regenerating

Now the days of winter dark. The shuffling around with red holes oozing. The knowing that the life of the past is evaporated, but longing for the normalcy of a girlfriend. Though a gastrointestinal cripple, I become manic to come up with a girlfriend. In the popular cyberspace haunts of the lonely hearts, I slash through like a machete in the jungle. Using the pictures of my summery healthy days, and the words of a partially disinterested and disenfranchised poet, it is not long before I have ten conversations going.

But I can't stand it. *So many flaws.* Here I am, Mr. Flaw himself, Captain Impotent, but I want the perfect woman. The one with raving beauty, brains to bury a Swarthmoor graduate, wit to stand up against Woody Allen, adventure coursing through her veins to shame Lara Croft.

Where is she? She sure as hell is not in this cyber cesspool of secretaries and DVD junkies. They are fat, they are ugly but, mostly, they are stupid. They don't understand what the hell I'm talking about, if anything. They say nothing interesting. It's all about an endlessly connected gene pool of other boring white trash morons. Cousin Clod did this, Sister Canker said that about it, Auntie Asshole decided to not see Clod or Canker . . . etc., etc.

So I ask them: "Do you think that dark energy really exists? Do you think that it is the real reason for the 100 billion light year hole in the universe that is devoid of all galaxies?"

"Uhhh . . . what's a galaxy? Didn't Ford make a car like that in the '70s? My Uncle Camshaft had a Galaxy, and him and Wanda Wet would . . ." *Blah, blah, blah.* I absolutely *can't stand it.*

So now that I have severed my sex life from the future of my existence, I seek to find some other intellectual lady with the icy sex drive of a roofing nail in winter. I see these over-intellectual types on the brainiac sites. True to form, they have no more desire for sex than for a gasoline milkshake.

The problem is that I am some sort of crossover between brains and earthy daring-do. The brainiacs see me as a dirt bag because I lack such things as a university position, or any position at all for that matter. *Why am I living out in the sticks? Is it a witness protection thing?* Ergo: *Am I a drug dealer?*

So I can hardly get past a few emails before I say something stupid about the sociological benefits of gangs, or the empowerment of women in Southeast Asia through prostitution. They are all so trigger-happy to eject me back into the void over something I'd hoped would lead to a quality conversation.

After a few months of this, I've had enough. All the hoses are unplugged from me, and the crimson lines are not weeping mystery snot any more. My sister has taken over a neighbor's house and her adult children have heard that there was a free hang-out here. The place fills with her clan of dirtbags. She rarely comes to see me in my little cabin on the side of the hill. It is just me and my schizophrenic cat. Just the four walls and a computer full of fat, stupid people.

Killing myself seems like an intelligent option, except for the fact that I've just spent all this money getting hacked up by the AMA prostate machine. Not that I feel so very obligated to make Dr. Hack's BMW payments.

It just seems so illogical. I feel obligated to stay alive for my kids who never contact me. Who don't even know I languish in loneliness. Just think how it would impact their lives if the father they don't know, and never answer, disappeared. Might cause some questioning thoughts a couple times a year. Wouldn't want to be responsible for that.

But if I was going to off myself, why would I have taken this ignominious route? Why not the route of excessive drugs, womanizing, and debauchery? Hell, I could destroy every part of my system with white powders, rob everyone I know to support the powder supply, catch any possible disease and transmit it wholesale, drive recklessly, invoke fights with huge tattooed ex-cons and, if I had all that fun, beat the cancer to the grave. *Damn, I must be a moron to pass up such an opportunity.*

What the fuck am I gonna do now? Be a nutless cower case doing some kind of goody goody nice ass job where I help illegal immigrants get more free cars and clothes? Maybe I could be the lunch menu coordinator in a woman's rape shelter with a "laugh at me" sign on my back. I'm getting pretty sick of this living shit. Doesn't seem to be much in it for me.

Then . . . the last shred of serendipity in the universe falls on my table, like a fish thrown from the tenth-story window.

She writes me. Thinks my "profile" says some clever crap. Wants to inquire about my theory that God is a cyclic mathematical manifestation. She's beautiful. Dark-haired, piercing gypsy eyes. Obviously well-proportioned and under the weight limit of an interstate truck. Hell, she is a modern mountain bike in a parking lot of '70s Dodge vans.

I have to play this one carefully. Can't jerk the line. Must loosen the drag tensioner on the reel. Let her have line if she needs it. A few intellectual emails later and we arrange to meet at a coffee shop. I can now go a few hours without pissing in my pants, so must be ready.

But why the hell am I doing this anyway? I'm no more sexual than a left-turn sign shot to hell on the roadside. But, I think, maybe she is the one to appreciate me, to stick with me, to help me love again, to grow with me to become more of a man than I used to be. Maybe she is the one I have seen in a hundred dreams for thirty years, her dark hair, her fixing eyes.

Dickless or not, it's worth a shot.

Not being the one to go into detail about my private life, I will exclude the details of our slow but budding romance. Suffice it to say that we go through most of the travails of any couple getting to know one another, plus a variety of others not normally on the menu. Those caused by my peculiar "condition." Naturally she is not without psychological damage, thankfully to match my own, as nobody seems to get to this regenerative age without what is commonly known as "baggage."

But what a delight it is to be able to work through and around this pile of fetid suitcases, to be able to drag some luggage out into the backyard and burn it. For this, for the fact that she has a full book of matches, I am eternally grateful.

But what of *It*? What of the question about how can a displaced megalomaniac satisfy a beautiful woman when words are not enough? I go after my options with the gusto of the family dog on the Thanksgiving table.

I feel ashamed around my beautiful girlfriend. I respond to her affections entirely in kind, but where there should be a rock hard bulge below the belly, there is only rubber. How can she know that she excites me? How can I show her my burning love and lust? How does she know that her administrations produce the desired effect? How long before she stops those affections in exasperation?

My girlfriend is an angel. She tells me that everything is fine. That it is of no consequence. That all that I do excites her. Things are OK.

I know she is lying, but she does it so very well. I love her for lying so well. I will do anything to make things right.

x. Solutions

I am told to wait by the doctor. All will be all right. I don't want to wait. Not another 32 seconds. I am told to wait for my erection nerve to regenerate. The nerve that tells the penis to fill with blood. The controller nerve. There used to be two, but Dr. Hack and others unanimously told me that the nerves are conduits for the cancer cells from inside the prostate to the body interior. So those nerves that are closest to the cancer need to be hacked out. In my case, the nerve on the right side had such qualifications.

These things are as fine as spider hair. To touch them means damage. Known among dick doctors as the "Veil of Aphrodite," they are best described as a single sheet of wet toilet paper stuck on a rough rock. To peel one off the prostate and hurl the latter is no small feat. It seemed then like the difficulty of some doctor trying to look up a hole between your balls and your asshole, then using his stubby fingers to pry the "veil" off. It sounded next to impossible.

Now I wonder if some gut craftsman might not have been more gentle with this nerve of all importance. I'm thinking that Dr. Hack hosed me. I can envision him now, those many months ago, feverishly working the controls on Robbie the Robot, hurrying to get on to the afternoon tennis game.

His hand is on a big black knob with little lines and numbers for the positions of *reverse* and *overdrive*. Doc Hack is jacking it in all directions making *varoom varoom* noises unconscientiously.

The excitement is energizing, to be excavating his "margin" around the marble-sized cancer, mucking a cavity the size of a football that includes half my bladder. That includes every miscellaneous connected mini-organ that ever secreted anything.

He really gets excited while scraping the "saved" nerve off the prostate, cramming the gear in reverse, and stomping the gas, then double clutching and peeling out into second gear the other way. I might as well be getting mined with a backhoe.

All the while, Robbie's whirling shred-o-matic arms are blending my organs for pumping out through a half-inch hose.

Although I was out colder than a block of ice, my body was still awake. It knew it was being drawn and quartered. It was contracting and squirming to get out of the way of the meat cleaver robot. When I finally awoke, my hands were all wracked out of position, deep muscle pulling around my thumbs and wrists. I was fighting my bonds unconsciously to escape. One of my eyes was nearly blind from blood pressure, and a tooth had been split in half from the extreme clenching. Split to the root. No amount of whiskey would cure it. It had to be jerked out by the hundred dollar Mexican dentist.

I fear the collusion of Dr. Hack and Robbie has done a Twin Towers on my erection nerves. One tower is destroyed, that much is for sure. The other is laying flat on the ground. What miracle will it take to re-excite this with electricity?

I am told that if you don't get a boner within two years, you're toast. You'll never get one again. I was told that I had a 60% chance of re-bonerating. Now, these months later, I'm getting pretty damn nervous. I can't stand not having a boner. It is the one defining thing that make men male, all the blood draining from our brain and filling this insatiable pogo stick that has us hopping around to its whim. I just love being that stupid.

Viagra does nothing. The neural disconnection is too great. Produces a headache and makes my face all flushed. Great. A boner face. Maybe if it gives me the Pinocchio nose I could do something with that but, no, just the effects of a mild fever. The flopper stays flapping. Nothing. At \$10 a pill, this is a bit of an expensive experiment.

So I go online and order from Canada at 1/3 the price. Takes about a month and then a package arrives from India. A couple dozen identical pills, except they don't have Pfizer stamped on them. Eat one. Less effect than the real McCoy. Obviously stepped on by some backyard chemist with baby laxative. Eat two, then three. My face looks boiled like a Scottish alcoholic and my vision is blurred 70%, but still no wood. *Where is the wood?* Would that I could, get some wood. *Shit.*

Dr. Hack proudly boasts that he can give a dead man a hard-on. His favorite is the implanted air inflation boner machine. Operated, I suppose, by a switch on your hip. One must use caution to not bump the elevator doors, lest you accidentally activate and impale two or three people in the confined space.

I reject that option wholesale. They chop you away and then replace you with android parts? *No*. Getting to far afield. Who wants to rely on Energizer batteries anyway? Dr. Hack is one sick puppy. He probably has some corpse in his living room with twenty inflatable penises on it. Likely plays Bach to the syncopated rising and falling of the ballet boners.

Another is the pump. I know, I know, we all think of some micro-dick guy with a goatee madly pumping away, trying to get from three inches to four, not realizing that his Corvette reveals his penis length to the majority of women anyway.

But I am instructed that it is all about blood. Get the blood into the afflicted member. This will cause healing. This will eventuate in natural boners.

There are two kinds of pumps. The \$600 medical pump, and the \$60 porno store pump. The books will tell you that they are the same thing; the only difference is the price.

At the next doctor's appointment, I get the whimpering doctor in a full nelson.

"Give me a boner, Doc. Gotta have it. Time's up. Don't let me down, or you'll be the guest cadaver at the chiropractic school."

"Take it easy, *take it easy*. No problem. We can give a dead man a hard-on."

"Ten minutes, or you're the dead man."

"OK, OK. What you need is the erectile enhancement system."

"Sure, whatever. Enhance me."

"Well, they are pretty expensive, but you can get a similar thing at an adult store. Has the same enhancement effect."

"You mean a porno shop?"

"Yes. One of those places."

"OK, Doc. This better work."

"See you in two weeks. Check with the nurse to set up the next appointment."

I finally find a porn store on the edge of the Mormon city. It is disguised as a dry cleaners. "Pleasures Dry Cleaning – Lingerie Laundered – Books – DVDs" is what the sign outside says. They have a rear entrance. As always with these places, there is a tiny twenty-something young lady working the counter. She is in some leather girdle garb with a studded neck collar and black spiked hair, but still a woman.

How can I shop comfortably in here? Why don't they have some obvious male child molester at the counter? Then a person could feel comfortable in the pervs store, knowing that they are way more psychotic than you. A woman will always give you the disparaging look if you are trying to buy the *Beach Butt Bingo* DVD. Well sure, little Miss Spiky has seen every variety of deviance come through the door, but this is me. I'm embarrassed. Way embarrassed. I tell myself that I will never see this person again in my life, what the hell, go ahead and expose my inner secrets.

"Umm, I called earlier regarding an erectile enhancement product?"

"A *whaaa?*"

"A penis extender?"

"You mean a cock pump?"

"Yeah, yeah, OK. One of those."

She gives me the wry female smirk that I had been expecting. The one that says, "*Haha! You have a tiny dick, muthafucker, and it will always be a joke. We women will always make fun of you.*"

"We have a wide variety of cock pumps. Follow me."

She leads me to a whole wall of multi-colored apparatus.

"Ummm, I don't know a thing about these. I only need it . . . for medical reasons."

"Uhhh, yeah. Sure, Mister."

"Which one do you recommend . . . for medical reasons, that is?"

"Mister, I dunno about no medical reasons, but my husband uses this one. The Iron Man Destroyer."

"Why is this one superior? They all look pretty similar to me."

"Hell, I dunno. Makes your cock huge. That's why."

"Oh. OK. I'll take this one then." I am bright red with embarrassment. I'm thinking she is interpreting it as being flushed by perversion, which makes me more embarrassed and red. The "cock pump" is iridescent blue and red. It has a squeeze bulb as is found on marine fuel systems.

"Ummm. How much?"

"For you . . . for medical reasons . . . 65 bucks. You want cock rings with that?"

"Uumm, I'm not sure. Do I need them?"

"Damn right. Keeps you hard. My husband Bruno gets as hard as granite."

"And then you crack walnuts with it?"

"Huh?"

"Oh nothing. Is that what you recommend?"

"Hell, we got fuzz-covered cock rings, cock rings with ticklers, adjustable cock rings, stud-covered cock rings, and even cock rings that light up. Look at all these. Best assortment in the area." She is showing me a different wall covered in the things.

"I'll just take that plain one there."

"It's adjustable, ya know. Bruno uses one of these too."

The thing is big enough to slip on a coffee cup and keep the creamer from getting loose. I can't help but visualize Bruno with his leather vest and dog chain, wagging an 18-inch member at this tiny spiky Jack Mormon.

I feel like I've inadvertently been pulled into a cheap porno movie. Like some pierced pervert is suddenly going to come out of the back room and rape me. *I gotta get out of here.*

"Now what do I owe you?"

"Want lubes with that?"

"You mean lubricant?"

"Yeah. Lube. Bruno always uses lube."

"Do I need it? What do you have?" I'm starting to wonder if "Bruno" isn't just a sales icon like the Geico lizard in those insurance commercials on TV.

"We have regular, sensual, duration, edible, and glow in the dark. Bruno uses sensual glow in the dark." I visualize Darth Bruno Vader's light saber glowing in the shadowy back room. Ready to spring out and slash us all into submission. An ugly thought.

"No. No, thank you. No lube."

"OK, suit yourself. That will be \$78.45." I hand over the credit card and almost forget to retrieve it. I can't get out of there fast enough with my wrinkly undisclosing plastic bag.

Bruno's Boner Bulger didn't work for shit. Got the goddamned thing home and set to work with it. The rubber gasket used to seal in the vacuum was designed for a porn star. I'm Captain Shrivel. I'm the 97-pound weakling who gets sand kicked in their face. I am embarrassed to myself. My sad unit is so terrified of the world, so atrophied from disuse, that it's become horribly puny. Its minuscule girth lays in the gaping rubber hole like a dog with its head out the car window. Not gonna happen.

I take the thing down to the shop and attempt to modify it by partially melting it with the torch, hose clamping it to a smaller diameter. The thing deforms and twists, and a gaping hole develops in one side. This I fill with silicone. Now it looks like some *Mad Max* version of the penile extender, hose clamps and bailing wire all over it. Clamp the thing on and set to work on the fuel pump bulb. A

tiny vacuum starts but is soon overwhelmed with a hissing and then farting noise of air sneaking back in to kill the vacuum.

This is romantic. I can see doing this in front of the girlfriend. Or maybe I could just get insanely frustrated in the bathroom as Junior lays there like wilted romaine lettuce. I'd be frantically mashing the pump bulb, carrying the beat while the hissing and flatulence sing the chorus.

Well, fuck this. Not working. Call the doctor's office. Want the goddamned \$600 unit. Want the Cadillac of dick enlargement. Want to be a man again.

Eventually I get the Cadillac and it works as it should. The thing is noisy and difficult. When all goes right, there is only a half hour window to make enjoyment. This is while the member is in some deadly strangulation grip of a cruel rubber ring. I imagine myself as one of those long balloons that are twisted into the shapes of rabbits and dogs, their necks gagged to a quarter-inch, their doggy noses flopping uncontrollably any-which-a-way. Still better than nothing. My loving lady is very gracious about it all.

I use my belt and the leg of the stool to garrote the neck of the doctor.

"Look, you little wiener. You're gonna give me something that makes the equipment work or I'm gonna snap your chicken neck like a twig!"

"Hooooookay, hooookay, sthopp it! Ahhh tell you! Ahhkkk . . . tell you!" I loosen the knot a turn.

"What? What then?"

"Gaa! Thank you." I still have my knee between his shoulder blades, ready to twist up a few turns. "You can get injections. Penile injections will do the trick."

"Explain. In detail. You have 40 seconds."

He does. In detail. Apparently there is a hormone, similar in fact to one's own natural substance, that works like super Viagra. It absolutely shuts off the return blood flow. Blood flows in, doesn't get out. Makes a monster boner.

The down side is that, like all these methods, there is no spontaneity. Have to keep the crap frozen in the freezer, make a pretense that you're going for more ice for your drink. Then secretly thaw it out, escape to the bathroom to draw it up in a syringe. Then grimace as you stab the base of your terrified cock with the needle, fumble with the plunger trying not to stab through the other side or break the needle off in there, finish up and hide all the evidence. Finally, somehow slip the bottle of hormone back into some inconspicuous place in the freezer, behind the peas.

At last my cock begins to tingle, then burn. Soon a fine erection of massive proportions arises from the ashes of my sex life. Hurts a goddamned fair amount, like a combination of strangulation and the hammered thumb sensation, but I don't care. I got the *mondo boner*.

Now to chase the beautiful one around the house. I'm *back*! Can't stop me. I'm ready to poke 40 holes through a mahogany plank.

Two hours later I am still hard. Perfect priapism. The lovely one is holding me at bay with a large kitchen knife. Enough is enough. What was fun is now out of hand. I feign from side to side thinking I might get behind her and have my way again, but she is too quick for me and the specter of Bobbit's unit laying in the grassy field looms in my mind. Besides, the damn thing is bright purple and feels like an industrial accident.

Reluctantly, I pack it in ice and wait for the relief valve to open a nanometer, draining my vein. All in all though, a wonderful experience. For those brief hours, I was a man again.

I don't care what this gook costs, I want a 55-gallon drum of it. Next time at the doctor's office, with my .357 Magnum pressed tightly against the doctor's temple, I get him to write a lifetime prescription for the stuff.

But it would be nice to be free of such mechanical manipulations. Surely they are better than nothing at all. I consider myself the luckiest man in the post-prostate world to have my wonderful woman, apparently not judgmental, willing to accept me in a semi-android condition.

But I can't help but wonder . . . worry. How long will she put up with these shenanigans? What is the depth of love? How, as a half a man, can I compete with the clear-eyed cowboys around me, so full of the saddle, the sage, the seed? Only with the cleverness of an intellect they can never have do I have any advantage.

But ever is the lust that burns in our soul, the fire of spontaneity, the fever of some backroom coupling. I could not fault her for this. We are but animals. I am a half an animal. If not the actual act, how long before the lustful longing clouds her libido towards me?

There is naught that I can do. Maybe an ill-timed surprise now and then, draining the 55 gallons of the secret sauce when she least expects it. Like when she's getting ready to leave for work, when she's waiting for her mother to show up, in the grocery store, in the bushes of the park. Break up the predictability of it all. I worry. I don't want to be left behind. But I know I must deserve what I get. I just can never accept it.

So I consider: what actually can be done? All these men, the movers and shakers of the world, why are not some solutions for restoration forthcoming? Solutions to restore the loss of all those nasty but wonderful fluids. That gunk was a hell of a lot of fun. A bit smelly it was, certainly an acquired taste for women. Messy all to hell for sure, and always irresponsibly gushed in all the inappropriate places.

Why can't we make some kind of refillable expulsion apparatus? It seems an easy proposition. All the electrical mechanisms remain in place to let the body know you are having an orgasm (praise be unto Allah), why not tie that electricity into a muck pump? Just think how popular you would be if you could expel peach or strawberry yogurt. You would be the hero at the 1972 Andes plane crash. You might even be popular among secretaries who forgot their office lunch. The Dapper Dispenser. A sort of Love Lunch. Use acidophilus yogurt and cure yeast infections at the same time.

I've heard of youth hormones getting drained out of the glands in the necks of lower Slovenian peasants. The vim and vigor of dirt-poor youth, birth-righted to a culture of vampirism, their precious fluids sold to be injected into some ugly rich and crotchety bastard in a New York penthouse. Give the old bugger the energy to goose the Nicaraguan maids.

So why can we not drain these 14-year-olds for prostate vitamins? Suck out the sexual stem cells. Get the growing and revitalizing juices from them who should not breed anyway. Get our industrialized world prostates growing back again. Regeneration for the rich. We all know it's coming. Let's get on with it.

Or, let's be nice, how about transplants? What about all those teenagers getting splattered in car wrecks every year? You can have the kidneys and liver and the other worthless parts, just give me the sex organs. Damn, 16-year-old prostate, look out!

Where's the monocular super surgeon working on transplanting prostates? Why did I have to be born in the dark ages? Why does no one care about the revitalization of my sex life? I pay taxes so we can go on killing Persian people, giving stupid people houses and food. What the hell about my ability to make love to a beautiful woman? I consider this a national emergency. Civilization as I know it has come to an end.

xi. The Insurance Myth

I am told by the pacified paranoid hoards of my irresponsibility for not having medical insurance. I am told of what a burden to society I will be. Told of the cost that I incur to taxpayers by my flagrant disregard of the rules of conduct. That my unwillingness and inability to pay will be transferred to all the abiding compliant masses who so responsibly and wonderfully pay their soaring and insanely greedy medical premiums every month. I should quit any notion of living a free life, full of self-growth and artistic expression. Get a job. Be a proper member of society and prey upon the socialistic graces of a major corporation. Engage in a mostly irrelevant job that sucks away my time, sucks away my spirit, and puts my life on hold. Disengage myself from the chaos of nonconformity



and embrace the regimented daily cycle of work, eat, and *pay*. Then I can be safe, secure in the warm blanket illusion that someone else is taking care of me. Then I can live in perfect and protected health to serve the sheep and the shepherd alike.

Naught do the sheep realize that the medical insurance beast is getting its pound of flesh off of the properly employed every month anyway. Oh, think they, to pay only a mere \$250 a month to maintain the wonderful umbrella of security. 'Tis nothing. But the reality is that the wages have been reduced by the employer to pay the other \$300 a month. This way the vampires can get their \$550 a head every four weeks, \$6,600 a year. A person would have to have an appendectomy every year to get their money's worth. Or maybe it will cover a car crash every four years. This is better than throwing yourself truculently at the tax treasury of the county.

But what of that? We pay our taxes to keep the roads fixed up—why not to keep the people who drive them repaired too? Is not the car and road, and the potential disintegration of the both, all part of the same system? What is this horrible pressure that is being put on the tax system? A system that should be designed to take care of the whole picture anyway.

The hospital bill is \$24,000. This is for everything they can possibly contemplate, marked up at least a 1000%. A pair of vinyl gloves put on to change my piss bag is charged at \$12. A box of fifty pairs of these sells for \$1.29 at Walgreens. Drip antibiotic is registered as \$134. The content is 200mg from India that has cost them 34 cents for the dose. Nurses' wages are held in check for the seventh year in a row. Maintenance is cut back so that dust bunnies congeal along the wall, and the windows are smeared from the previous guy's slime.

But still the cost must go up. The hospital corporation is dedicated to keeping 174% ahead of greedy insurance price rises. The baby boomers are crashing into the hospital lobbies like a tidal surge as the 60-year-old body obsolescence factor kicks in. The floor is painted in cash. The resulting slush fund is vast. The money is reprocessed into corporate insurance and pharmaceutical stock. A "mad money" fund of cash simmers in the vault at the third basement level.

But the hospital is a semi-public institution. How can they be called Saint Michael's, Saint Teresa's, or Lady of the Lake Mercy Medical, if they do nothing saint-like? How can the saints have no mercy? Where is Saint Mercy? What sort of public image is it to have a 700% profit margin every month?

The answer is that, unknown and unmentioned in the mythology of "Health Insurance," there is a hunched-over benevolent accountant, assigned to be the Band-Aid conscience for the institution. Lost in the catacombs of the windowless basement complex, this person weighs the enormous profits of the hospital against its charitable donations that will neutralize the tax bill. Assuage their guilt. The destitute and beleaguered who fall through the system's cracks having neither corporate employment nor any recordable income, nor any of the sacred "Health Insurance." They are investigated for charitable candidacy.

I embody this status. It is first mentioned to me when they wheel me into the hospital room. A motherly figure with a clipboard wavers in my drug-saturated vision, telling me how my indigence qualifies me for some "help" with the bill. I see her snap the clipboard closed and then I pass out into the pillow, my guts a spider web of stitches, the morphine saturating my system.

When I awake, I wonder if it was a dream. The nurses know nothing about this Mother Goose person I describe. Was she wearing a bonnet?

A month out of the hospital I receive a letter saying that I have five days to comply with their questionnaire, give all bank account numbers, tax records, employment stubs, and my mother's maiden name. Failure to comply, or be one instant too late, will disqualify me from any "help."

Rapidly I gather what information I have. But it is amazing, foremost, that I have an address. I am after all, the lowest form of pond scum in society. I have no job, haven't for years. *What taxes?* Ya mean I was supposed to be paying taxes on panhandle money all this time? What do I put on the 1040 occupation line . . . *beggar?* If I had the stupid corporate job I'd already have the goddamned health

insurance and wouldn't be needing any "help" anyway.

I fill it out as best I can, describing what jobs I have had, like cleaning yards. The occasional hundred-dollar gift from my father to buy a new pair of boots and a few sausages for supper. It is all so pathetic. It is also all so unrecorded.

I call back in a week and ask after the paperwork. *Oh no*, they say, *it is all quite lost, but you don't have a snowball's chance in hell anyway, because you have no tax returns, no pay stubs from a corporate job, or both. If you are truly poor, it is our job to see that you die off. So just pay your bill till you die. Hopefully that will take a long time, and all of us accountants down here in the basement can order pizzas with the free lunch money for the next 47 years.*

OK. I can accept my fate. I hope they get indigestion from the pepperoni. I broke the unwritten rules of society; now I must pay for my folly. Every month another bill telling me how I still owe. Every month I write a check for \$27.05 to be applied against the balance. There is no vision of ever being free. It just is as it is. An immutable force similar to gravity. It is still cheaper than the premium payment every month to the insurance vampires.

Then *this!* This month's hospital bill says *zero* balance! The bill is entirely paid off with hospital charity. The net profit to hospital shareholders just went up 1/10 of a point because that's \$23,972.95 they don't have to pay taxes on. The Pope will come out and bless the shit out of them for having mercy on the poor.

I am flabbergasted. I've never heard anything like it. The myth of being society's burden has just been sucked up into a larger, profit hiding, corporate tax machine. All beneficial all around. There are no losers here. For me, individually, lightning has struck. I want to run back to the surgery admitting station and see if I can get something else carved off. *I mean, how good a deal is that?* Hell, I don't think I'm using my duodenum much except for fat absorption and ulcers. Sharpen the knives. Put me under while the sale lasts.

xii. National Emasculation

A mass genocide of the American male genitals is currently underway, the likes of which has not been seen since the government gave the Indians smallpox-infected blankets. The slaughter is now approaching 20% of the population, and increasing yearly. Statistics are cooked to make higher PSA numbers, and lower the average age of the victim to be emasculated.

The AMA invented "necessary" fad surgery in the early 1960s when it declared that no American child should carry potentially infectious tonsils. Through media terror tactics, soon the parents were lining the children up in front of clinics to be brutalized.

After a few billion dollars of gross national product in the "service industry" of throat lacerations, the public began to grow wary. Tonsillectomies removed the first line of defense from an aggressive disease cesspool in every kindergarten across the county.

The children were acquiring more colds and flus than ever before. Child sinus problems were epidemic. Between the stockyard and the preschool, it rained antibiotics. Though the surgery was effectively de-bunked, it was still good business practice to support the pharmaceutical industry.

The new announcement came out that no American was safe while sporting an appendix. This is a residual organ left over from when we were cows, and serves no purpose other than to become infected and kill us in our tracks. A sort of God-implanted self-destruct button. Just see what it did to Houdini. A clear example of an heroic American murdered by the wrath of God. Again the surgeons' appointment books were filled, as the masses lined up to be sliced open for the profit of the elite doctors.

This surgery was more complex, and therefore more expensive. While they're in there wading around with scalpels, there was other money to be made. *We might as well pluck out this gall bladder, no evidence that it does anything and, hey! might as well have a look around.* A \$10,000 appendectomy can be

run up to \$20K or even \$30K, with just a little medical imagination. It is, after all, all in the patient's best interest.

The birth control pill gave women the first reliable method to avert pregnancy and enjoy sex without it being life threatening. Given the new freedom and the onslaught of recreational drugs in the 1960s, a sexual revolution took place, full of utopian love. These were the golden years . . . *goddamn, I miss them*. To be young during that time was a cornucopia of wonderful sex. Nothing worse than the clap prevented us from screwing the hell out of each other with no possible down side, excepting the occasional hurt feelings in a *ménage de trois*.

But women were the guinea pigs to the testosterone-fueled moralistic megalomania of the uptight 1950s doctors. They sought a *Stepford Wives* solution to peace on the planet. Estrogen derived from pigs and cattle were pumped wholesale into women at doses 100 times their natural levels. This soon resulted in extensive cancers of the mysterious female reproductive organs. As "consumption" was formerly a catch-all name for lung conditions like tuberculosis, these new oncologies were collectively called "female problems."

An instant industry sprang up based on the complete removal of all female sexual organs. Hysterectomies. For any ailment—cramping, pregnancy, a longer period than usual—*up on the chopping block, split 'em open, jerk out all the wombs and ovaries we can find*. Similar to cleaning trout after a good day of fishing.

Woe to the woman who admitted to discomfort from an IUD poking through her guts, a stuck egg in a fallopian tube, or lower Gastonia gas, it was all "female problems" and demanded an immediate surgical cure. Many doctors removed the clitoris also as the source of the offending problems, it being believed among white male surgeons that this "residual penis" had no function on a female anyway.

Throughout the 1970s, the medical dumpsters filled with the reproductive potential of the country. But, by the end of that decade, it became vogue for women to buck the wisdom of the all-knowing male, fashionable to understand the interior plumbing that was unique to their sex, and responsible to question and resist the dictums of the blinding white AMA. Women doctors and gynecologists became popular, much to the mortification of the many male manipulators of the stirrups.

Having lost the battle to play God with female genitalia—and destroy it as it suited them—the AMA then turned to brainwashing women about how awful their body was. They were too lumpy, soft, very likely smelly, leaked all the time, and the hidden parts were cesspools of virulent microphages struggling to get out and overwhelm the world in a proterozoic pandemic.

Since the early 1950s, the message to women had been that the breast is disgusting and dirty, not to be seen outside of the centerfold of *Playboy* magazine. Nursing your baby is bad. Babies should be fed with chemical products that loosely resemble dog milk. Breasts should be tightly confined and covered in aluminum chlorohydrate to clog all the pores, preventing any unseemly feminine odors.

The lack of natural breast feeding not only created a generation of psychopaths raised by wire monkey mothers, but denied women's bodies their natural chemical course of making and expressing milk. Combined with the suffocation by anti-perspirant applications, breast cancers began to proliferate. Here was a malignancy outside of the modern woman's knowledge of vaginas. Now the message was: *your breasts are not only disgusting to us, but they will kill you if you give them a chance*.

Clearly this was the consequence of some sort of wild living in the previous decade. It was deemed proper punishment for such carnal transgressions. The AMA had the solution. Hack off the breast. Hack off the other one too, just in case. If she survives, we wouldn't want her to be asymmetrical. A huge national campaign of terror about diseased breasts crossed the country. All women must check for breast cancer and be amputated to save their lives. All women must come in for mammograms. A mammogram is a fancy word for being fried with high intensity X-rays. The beauty of this process for the medical world, is that:

1. *women must come in, expose their breasts to a salivating technician who can't afford a Playboy, and pay some considerable amount of money to do so;*
2. *if the technician dribbles a piece of his sandwich or anything else on the film, or some legitimate fly speck shows up on the development, the woman is immediately scheduled for a double mastectomy, the removal of both her beautiful protrusions; and*
3. *if nothing is found on the film to justify the massacre of her chest, then the high dose of radioactivity used to photograph the mammary is sure to cause cancer in the next year or less.*

If the woman is resilient enough to fight off this mini-Chernobyl, the doctors assure her that she must have the radiation repeated every year. Because a potential double mastectomy is in the \$30,000 range, the doctor cannot justify overlooking such revenue-aping opportunity. Through the 1980s and into the 1990s, two hundred thousand breasts are flung to the dumpsters, enough to make highway lane separators from Seattle to New York, and back to LA. Of these, probably only 20% were necessary to save lives.

As the 1990s began, tiny page 4 reports begin to show up in the newspapers that confess that mammograms might not actually be necessary every year. Self-examination is promoted by women's health groups, much to the chagrin of the previously happy two-handed examining doctors. As the '90s close, mastectomies are but a brutal part of medical history, tiny tumors now being removed individually with precision and minimal involvement to the majority of the vilified organ.

Happily, as the enthusiasm for breast removal decreases, the need for artificial breasts increases. The silicone implant industry is born. Delightfully, a woman need not even have breast cancer to avail them selves of this enhancement. The media shifts to create the paradigm that the only women worth a shit are the ones with gigantic breasts. The more mammoth, the better. Dolly Parton becomes a movie star with no more brains than an egg white. No, the hideously fat are not included in this new definition of beauty; correct tits will be huge and precariously balanced on a 110-pound frame.

In times past, a woman of these dimensions was considered a mutant. Nevertheless, 252 million women begin regimes of starvation to attain the 110-pound status. Successful attempts at this bring mortification that their breasts have shrunk with the general emasculation. No problem, just head off to your local boob doctor with six grand in your purse. In a few hours you will be as endowed as Dolly is. *Will you be able to act with such talent?* Probably. What a wonderful thing, to fill women with silicone, and make rock hard, ice-cold breasts to be photographed for the centerfold. Those dinosaurs of days distant cannot compare to the sculpted chests of these futuristic pioneers. Soon a quarter of the country are sporting artificial appendages.

It predominantly appeals to those who have to spend 25% of their yearly income on such a thing: the truck drivers, the biker bitches, the low-end porno queens, the trailer trash of America seeking to snag a man higher up on the food chain than Cousin Klepto. The more refined and educated women of the law schools, the medical world, even the bank tellers, do not feel the urgency to make themselves into permanent Halloween costumes. At some social level, the fad expires.

But sad are the pioneers of this enhancement, for those whose implants are ten years old or more have found a disfigurement to match any contract made with the devil. The human body will tolerate a foreign object in it for only so long, attempting to dissolve it, move it, or wear it away in some fashion. Old implant jobs sag to new areas, then burst open, releasing gobs of silicone to weird places, and even at times poison the hapless owner. The ten year false tit owners now have three or four tits arranged in areas around their bellies, on the side of ribs, and sunken down to their waist lines. Now they are truly mutants, requiring surgery to remove the scattered silicone gel, and get back to being just ugly old hags.

As it is with the medical field, the recognition and development of the next surgical gold rush

is usually underway while the last fad is fading. So it was that it became apparent that many men died ignominiously every year from prostate cancer. Never was it actually a tumor in the prostate that killed these men, for the organ itself has a walnut-like character. It stingily confines whatever is inside its leathery walls. But cancer is a renowned jail breaker. Its enthusiastic form of cell mutation eventually breaks through its confines to colonize the rest of the body. This results in the death of the surprised host.

Following the initial study of the prevalence and genesis of this disease, the urologic division of the AMA clapped its hands in delight. Here was a malignancy that damned near every male who lives past 60 has a wonderfully developed case of. Most men are developing symptoms in their 40s and 50s thanks to non-point source pollution and carnivorous free radicals. The cancer grows slowly for the first five to ten years, so there is plenty of opportunity to “cure” it before it escapes into the bones and livers, becoming something else entirely.

The demographic is perfect. Here are all these men, their wallets full of the labors of their young lives, their responsibilities changed from family care to a last fling of hedonistic indulgence. Their mental state is re-focused on applying their sexuality to its best advantage before the clock stops ticking. Time is short.

Obviously, the AMA strategy of targeting sex organs is highly effective. If your liver is going bad, or you have a persistent rash, or your lungs are at half capacity, this is the normal path of life. No reason to spend money on that. Sooner or later you will die from it, and your death will be no more uncommon than getting up in the morning to go to work. But if somebody is fucking with your balls, that gets your attention. Any kind of operation directed toward the main department is major serious business.

The love affair with your genitals began before puberty and continues unabated. Every day you would get the thing out and fool around with it. Peeing is incredibly fun. Walking down the street or waiting in the post office line, there your stuff is, nudging you, bouncing around, rising and falling, begging to be played with. Constantly it reminds you of what you are doing on this planet. Your purpose. Feed the one eyed worm to women. Get busy on this. Forget not for a second your reason for existence. If something is wrong in this department, it is a catastrophe. Even protection of your car ranks far below the urgency of this issue. You have to save the package at all costs.

The doctors know this. Trained in medical school with MRI feedback, similar to the bio-rhythm alpha-wave craze used by feel-good hippies, the doctors have been taught to be numb. To be heartless butchers, devoid of empathy. Sinister surgery is their craft. But they too regard their own superior genitals the same as the common man. Though they have no more conscience about cutting a man into confetti than they do about slicing out the eye of a porterhouse steak, there is common thought and feeling regarding the family jewels. Whether senator or sailor, this concerns us all. How then to launch a PR program to get men to come in for repair? Among men, word of mouth will do the trick. But what is the pick-up line? Early death? Too obvious. Required checkup? Too tame. Lucky for them, they have a Holy Grail. Prostate Specific Antigen.

This antigen was discovered by a nerd in an unwashed lab jacket, late one Saturday night. Under an erratic blinking florescent light, beside a table of cold twinkling test tubes, no hope for a date with a girl, the nerd toiled into the darkness. Then he found it. He found that abnormal prostate cells cause the immune system to make a specific antigen to combat the unusual invader. A titration petcock in one hand and an index finger excavating his left nostril with the other, the nerd developed a way to measure the quantity of the antigen from a blood sample. The amount of antigen collaborated with the extent of genital encroachment by cancer. The PSA test was born. This was the silver bullet for the urologic doctor-midlife male bank account connection.

Around this miracle of medicine, the media is manipulated to malevolently measure your impending doom. All men over 30 must rush in for testing. The consensus conclusion is that you will soon be dead, unless you submit to samurai surgery or one of the other “options.” Men are told that

there are 230,000 new cases diagnosed every year. That by age 50 you have a 40% chance of having cancer in your prostate. Exciting racist news reports that blacks have a 60% higher incidence than whites of corrupted prostates. That Asians have a 30% less chance, presumably because of the high consumption of estrogen mimicking soy.

We men are told that the incidence of prostate cancer has risen 240% in the last ten years. But how is this possible with the lower consumption of steak and fried chicken? The answer is that they've threatened the job security of the lab nerd. Following his directive, he altered the criteria for the input data parameters, making the PSA test more "sensitive." As a 1960s cow-consuming citizen, chanting "let there be beef," you may have had a PSA of 3.3. This was well under the limit of worry. Now with a re-cooking of the numbers you have an 8, which is a straight line to the operating table. What was a "wait-and-see" position suddenly converted to an aggressive, out-of-control, consumption-crazed cancer. These terror tactics are feeding the new disemboweling frenzy.

The AMA pats our backs in a sympathetic and grandfatherly way. If we will only submit, they will kindly save our lives. They somehow neglect to tell you that the new definition of life is less than eunuch's, for even the nutless can still get a woody in the harem. Your new life will be that of a wall-hugging snail, cowering at the piercing glances of the all-knowing females. No turbocharged Humvee will mask your impotence.

We are informed that 1.8 million of these mutilated males "survived." That means that half a million of us did not. About 1 in 5 died anyway. So even if you go through the laceration machine, you still have a 20% chance of winding up stiff—and not in the good way. But their argument remains convincing. I was convinced, an educated man, terrified at the thought of death, unknowing of the a-sexual life ahead. The life without purpose.

Concealed from me was the new prostate news. Indeed the doctors knew it, but said not a whisper. Instead I was terrorized with the urgency. I was told that I had but weeks, a few months at best, before the malignancy took over my body on the freeway to death with no exits. I must submit quickly, they said. What lay behind their urgency was that I might find out. That the *Star Trek* cure existed.

As I had wished for, the new treatment to spare me the knife was well under development. They feared that they would be cheated out of their greedy income. At an average rate of 40,000 greenbacks a "cure," the collective AMA urologists have built a respectable \$9.2 billion a year industry. No \$50 bottle of pills can be allowed to disrupt this income, a decrease of revenue by a factor of 800.

The lab nerd, a true scientist, reviewed the data and scientific method of calculating the PSA number. His black glasses were low on his nose, which snorkled lightly as he removed the index finger from his nostril. The PSA number was indeed "cooked" by the economic machine above him, he concluded. Offended by such a scientific distortion of the data, in despair that power had corrupted reason, he shifted his genital research into new lines of thought. In an endless night of days, deep in the windowless university basement with crumpled candy wrappers strewn about the floor, the dedicated nerd prevailed.

In a burst of insight, a Mars bar gumming the cracks between his teeth, the nerd envisioned PSA as a locator to track the cancer's origin. No bigger a numerical statistic to sentence the body cavity to excavation, but instead a protein manufactured and expressed by the defense system of the cancerous mass itself.

Peering through the microscope, a caramel smear unnoticed on his cheek, the nerd saw that the mutant cells disguised themselves with specific proteins. This rendered them invisible to the immune system of the host. By analyzing the chemistry of these proteins, he discovered how to dissolve these masking proteins off the cancer cell and expose them to the fury of the body's own killer T cells.

Elated, he emailed a copy of his research findings upstairs to the College of Biology dean's secretary. He had been trying to get a date with her for years.

"Meet me in the cafeteria for some orange soda and French fries tomorrow morning at 11. I

will explain the most amazing discovery to you in detail!" he boastfully asserted.

The nerd was sure that such impressive brain power would tip the scales in his favor with the beautiful biology assistant. But just to take no chances, he synthesized a hair jelly from methane gas and hand cleaner, quietly, making soft liquid noises in his excitement, working obsessively through the night. Ample application of this concoction, he reasoned, would surely excite the libido of the secretarial beauty at his impending triumphal declaration.

The secretary was indignant and repulsed, as she had been before, by the nerd's needy email. Not only was the little man disgusting, but she had no more intention of eating French fries with him than licking dog crap off the front lawn.

At 10:05 that morning, in a fluster of secretarial confusion, she accidentally attached the nerd's research notes in an email to the dean, while trying to send out the statistics of inducting lower grade point average students to the College of Biology.

By 10:17, the dean had discovered the attachment and was well into the reading of it by 10:20.

By 10:48 he was on the phone to a Bombay pharmaceutical company, clinching a deal, which included the manufacture and distribution of the protein-dissolving agent.

At 11:33, the nerd sat in the cafeteria, slurping the bottom of his orange cola with a milk shake straw, the cooling fries before him, piteously scanning the entrances for the secretary who would never show.

Simultaneously, the first batch of prostate cancer vaccine was on a plane from Bombay to China for clinical trials.

By the week's end, the lab nerd was sniffing under his armpits for the answer to his non-existent love life—and 700 Chinese men had been cured of cancer.

Unbeknownst to this unwitting, unrequited scientist, whose attention had shifted to the viscosity of his hair gel mixture, the world was erupting with the news of the vaccine. The nerd found to his disappointment that the gel was annoyingly runny, and had caused hair to sprout thickly on his neck. As the vaccine news rapidly tore through Southeast Asia, some clever Cambodian named it, Provenge.

Within months, Provenge was back in the United States in 120 clinical trials, trying to beat the Asian advantage in marketing. The naked and visible cancer cells were being gobbled by killer T cells in every longitude of the earth. It was discovered that it also worked on cervical cancer, then ovarian cancer. Work was being done on liver cancer, stomach cancer, and results were even surfacing for specific skin cancers. The Internet was afire in 60 languages, preliminary results published by the hour. Four major clinics in China were instituted specifically for dispersion and treatment for prostate and ovarian cancers. People were flocking to these clinics from Amsterdam to Austin, Texas.

The American Cancer Society, in conjunction with the AMA, was in an uproar. Here was their carefully developed livelihood slipping between their fingers. A thousand other diversionary research projects designed to extract funding were rapidly becoming invalid. The vested interests cried of fraud, charlatanism, dangerous science, and witchcraft. The FDA, in the pocket of these powers, firmly announced that the Provenge product would not be granted license to be produced for at least 20 years, citing that there was not enough long-term research to support the evidence. England and Germany followed suit, lest their blood money be also jeopardized.

By now, thousands had been pulled back from the brink of internal rot. Now there were hundreds of thousands in clinical trials in every corner of the spinning planet. Now, in the basement of the biology building, the nerd was sporting a well-coiffed mullet of wolf-man hair, carefully planning his next romantic foray from the lab.

The politics of the medical world continued to wrestle between monetary mastery and the truth. The fervor of the scientists pitted between corporate greed and the minions salivating for a cure. My girlfriend, in fear that Robbie the Robot might not have excavated the whole of the corruption within me, sent me an itinerary to Beijing, Yahoo! directions through the foreign city's corridors, to

the Provenge clinic. The appointment schedules of Yangs and Changs so busily engaged with the new vaccine. To her sweet energies, I am indebted.

But I tire so of the medical machine. Cure or no cure, surgery or hypnotism, I've had about enough of this white way of medicine. I think now, should I require additional adjustment, that I should take my case to those entrenched in the traditions of plants and animals. Those whose practices are not dependent on the centrifugal extraction of complex antigens. But, instead, seek the healers deep in the Amazon jungle, whose medicines are the excreted sap of an obscure shrub, a mashed mixture of insects, and sonorous chanting to an unknown spirit entity.

Consequently, I am loading up on Korean copies of Leatherman knives, and have a ticket for a boat ride in a dugout canoe into the upper reaches of the Rio Negro. There I'll trade my wares with some locally revered witch doctor. The bone in his nose will gyrate as he intones, anointing me with snake wart powder and brown spider stings, curing me as it should be done.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Eleventh Series

*"Myriad lives like blades of grass,
yet to be realized,
bow as they pass."*
—The Shins, "For Those to Come," 2003.

xix. Blue Suitcase (Dreamwalker)

I do not believe it was just a container,
that only what within it mattered.
I do not believe the blue suitcase
itself was not of real consequence.
I believe the one called the Architect
sent this suitcase back through time
in an effort to save human history itself.
Alter its destructive course. *Help us help him.*

We were back on our ship. We six,
long-time brothers, again navigating
the Wide Wide Sea, free of land,
free of how land binds men to a place,
a sense of possession, laws to guard this
possession, weapons to defend these laws.

"No man owns the Sea, no more than
he can keep & cage & name his dreams,"
I observed to Asoyadonna that first day out.
We're relaxed against the deck railing,
her auburn hair billowing about her.
She smiles me quietly. "My Aunt
would say the world lets us loose to play
awhile, & what we return to her
with isn't in our hands."

Everyone kept needless busy that first day,
 mending fixed things, ordering
 sorted shelves, studying maps empty
 of land. Eating little at dinner &
 retiring too early each to his long-held
 cabin. None trespassed each other's
 by chance, so I lay quietly in my bunk,
 rooting my mind like an old attic,
 for hours, wondering if anything in it
 to help us. Fell asleep, like often,
 to the flutter of birds, singing, chuckling,
 in their midst a girl with such long,
 tangling hair.

Next day, now far out to Sea,
 something loosed from me, the air
 sweeter to breathe, easier. No land!
 Our first full day beyond land,
 its sinking grasp! Roddy & Odom were
 who spied the dolphins beside us,
 made to leap & ride them, laughing failed.

Dusk found all six of us arrayed
 on deck, our supper a good one,
 our tankards filling directly from
 the barrel Francisco had rolled
 up from below.

A dusk properly enjoyed with quiet
 & attention. A moon waxing to light
 our needed cheer. Everyone an old story
 or rousing song. The King his usual
 riddle none of us had ever solved.

"Cease the tide by cursing the moon?
 Crush the drum heads, men will pound
 their stones, twice harder!
 Bind a woman's fire & she will lay
 Dreaming coming stars!" Everyone laughs.
 None as ever an answer.

You retired first of us all. Didn't look
 tired. A glint that did not tell sleep's
 lure. I wondered, nodded with the rest,
 drank on. Roddy & I last at it,
 as often. His talk of the White Woods,
 his shacks, leather bucket, friend
 with the red whiskers. His heart
 willing owned by those places & years.

"Yet you left."

"Did & didn't. Did."

I nod. There's nothing else.

His sudden sharp look upon me.

"We'll need you when we arrive. Tis no sane place we travel to."

"We'll need all of us."

A hand on his rocky shoulder, & a shuffle a-bed. But no birds tonight. No long-haired lost loves.

My dreams numb of picture, word, advice.

Neither waking nor sleeping. Stand, stagger, stand. To my desk, its pile high of old books. Dusty, useless. Then a look at my vials & flasks of herbs & powders. Sleepless, I sort through them, sniff a little, taste a little. Begin to mix them together, eyes half shut, focusing on our task, this coming Island, coming Gate, coming Cave, coming Beast.

Do I sleep? With eyes open? Continuing to mix, crumble, powder? This admixture I swipe by finger into the pouch my father gave me when he knew me old enough to be neither singer nor cheerful peddler of pots like he.

"Find what your valuables are in this world. Keep them in here. Think of me, these old years."

An image before me briefly:
A spread of fresh warm blood
on a log, a huge axe from the sky,
chopping it twine.

Fewer steps than possible up to deck & the golden pinking dawn upon horizon.

And, there, *not possible, land!*
An Island where no map would claim one.
I shout my brothers awake. Shout & shout them. Years for this, *for this*.



Sober as schoolboys found by the preacher,
 caught with a hand down her
 giggling pink panties, lips tasting her
 hard virgin's nipple. We stand side by side
 & behold the living object of our
 years-long quest. Each hoarsely waiting
 the others speak a word, snap this
 silence, make us men again.

Tis Francisco, goodness love him,
 reading my mind as often he did
 on my face. "She was no virgin."

I laugh. *Damn it all, we all laugh.*

Spell snapped, we ready to cast our
 long boat into the water. Anchor down,
ready. Never a question we will all go.
 Nor answers to what our intent this first time.

Weapons? No. Food, extra clothes? Yes.
 Bed rolls. Tents. I make sure to bring
 my pouch of dream powder.

Few words, enough to pack the boat,
 get everyone aboard. As I clumsily
 climb from larger to smaller vessel,
 that image recurs before me, like
 painted on a curtain I press near.
 I wave it off, & again. Nobody notices.
 Perhaps the King. It dissipates of
 its own whim.

We row closer & closer to the shoreless
 rocky ledge. Tis then I notice in
 the clear blue-green waters something
 darker blue, solid, not belonging
 where it is. I reach for it, grunt
 an order to the rest. "Steer this
 way. There's something!" "What's that?"
 "I don't know. A little nearer."
I don't know. I don't know.

* * * * *

xix. The Mirror (Asoyadonna)

I don't know what I feel as we ride
 into the King's old homeland, the sufferings
 of these people like my own, like it happens
 everywhere in this world I fell to
 so long ago, before I can recall.

I don't know what to think as I see
 our King leap more than fall in love
 with Deirdre, who I know before he does
 is also from Emandia, also fallen
 here from a place far & gone.

So knowing neither, just that here
 is where we are until we learn
 something, I give myself to tending
 the injuries, in thwarted hearts &
 tired bodies. These are all my brothers now.

We free them of their masters,
 & lure them to take up their own way,
 work beside them to repair, to build,
 to bond as more than slaves in one cage.
 Wake up to a good day's work, sleep under
 stars, as free now as they are.

There are skills in these people,
 we find them out. Some at growing,
 some at putting up solid structures,
 others at sewing & mending clothes,
 at cooking. No longer needing to resist,
 eluding, hiding, resenting, they bloom.

We've done this before, many times.
 But the King was never in love, near
 at moments to *happy*.

Of them all, it was Deirdre alone who
 waited our departure. We spoke of this
 only once in all the months we were
 among them. I found her on the
 shore one day where I myself would break
 from the hours of mending & building.
 We sat together awhile in approaching tide.

“What do you think it looks like?”
 “What’s that?”
 Turquoise eyes on me. Fierce, steady.
 “This world, saved?”
 “I don’t know.”
 “Do you think of there?”
 I take a chance. “Emandia?”
 “The Sea. Out there. Where our lost home
 sent us.”

I pause. “We sailed it many years. But the home
 I lost is where I grew. My village. My father.
 My Aunt.”

She nods. Smiles.

I stand. Touch her hair, her shoulder.
 Uncertain, maybe spooked, I return
 to my tent. Lie on my bed of blankets
 & pillows, where I often share nights
 with my various brothers still. My five.
 The King least often. Dreamwalker most.

The tent’s ceiling flap open, to let in
 fresh air, light, the leaves above
 dapple in the breeze. Drift, drift
 further. Aunt. The last night we stayed
 with her. Her warning of growing roots
 as we are here. Her warnings of many things.

Brushing my hair with my mother’s small
 ivory brush. Slow strokes, long & pensive.
 Talk, eventually.

“Do you remember the songs we sang
 of the Island & its magic Gate,
 when you were small?”

“Of course.”
 Thoughtful brush stroke. Another.
 “What is it?”
 “*Do you remember them, Asoyadonna?*”

I gesture her still her brushing.
 We face each other on my bed, in my
 same old room from those gone years.

"Tell me, child."

"The Gates were sent out to many worlds, from Emandia. Portals through dreams." Pause. "You told me I'm from there."

"Do you remember?"

I think again, close my eyes, wonder her dread tone. "They're where a world begins. And . . . where it ends."

She nods. "The world may, or may not, be saved."

"But we have to try."

She nods. Reaches into the deep pocket of her long leavsy dress. Pulls from it a small mirror. Hands to me. I look within. My self. My girlish self. Tempted to touch my hair a bit. Do not.

"Pull it wider, with both hands."

I gasp, hesitate, tis Aunt talking, do.

It pulls wider, easily, like clay, but does not thin. Just pulls from itself. Pull till it's the size of my head & Aunt touches my hands.

"What tis?"

"Look now."

I look down into this shiny thing in my hands & see no reflection of myself. Tis a deep twilit pond. Lillies dot its surface, among them the reflection of a great mountain, its shore unseen.

"Where?"

"Far."

"Where?"

"Very far."

Her dark eyes inside my skull now, but me learning nothing from them.

"Tell me. *Please*."

Silence. Dark eyes. Then.

"It's another way out. Pull it wider & taller, enough to walk through,

lean it against a wall or a tree, & do."

"Just me?"

"It won't stay open long."

"Can I return?"

"Not long."

"*How long?*"

"Count of ten each way."

Silence. Softly, "Why?"

Softly in reply, "This is how Travelers endure."

"What of my brothers?"

More softly still, "I don't know, child."

She could tell no more.

I pulled out this mirror, & studied it, when restless, uncertain,
sometimes my face, sometimes the pond,
wondering, unknowing, thinking what
of Deirdre, of Aunt, the King, my brothers?

Think of it again tonight, more fearful
than uncertain, two days into our final voyage
to arrive the Island. This afternoon I found
Francisco on the deck, back of the ship,
painting furiously away. I had not seen
him touch brush to canvas yet on board.

He rarely stays still when painting.
Sways back & forth, paints in flurries
of strokes, walks away, walks back.
Seems sometimes to battle his images from
his head, seducing, cajoling, smacking
if he must. He paid me no more mind
than the sunny breeze about him,
the choppy waves below.

The image is terrifying, not of his
usual themes or styles. Harsh render
of an axe-twined log, blood pooled
fresh & heavy around it. Execution?
Murder? A man? An animal? I watch
wordless & horrified. Helpless.



The Wide Wide Sea is as still as
 it gets, *hmmmming* softly through
 my open window as it often does. The King
 has probably taken the dream powder
 I traded the mirror for, to the Travelers
 I'd met approaching our camp,
 looking for asylum, desperate, willing.

I tell them where to go, what to say,
 assure them of their welcome.
 "What can we give you for this kindness,
 sister? Anything ours is yours."

A simple trade. They take the mirror,
 so I need never choose between my life
 & my brothers. In return a powder
 when my King needs to say goodbye
 again to his happiness, his lost home.

Francisco's painting. *We may not save the world.*

* * * * *

xxi. Axe-Twined Log (Francisco)

My tent in our new Kingdom grows
 to feel like my first studio, the one
 immolated by a lover's rage, so much
 of me destroyed that it was only
 the loss of the one-footed girl which
 tindered up my heart again.

I think of that studio as we settle
 in here more, as I watch the King
 walk with Deirdre, see on his face
 the moving lights of passion, of love.
 I start to unpack my rucksack for
 the first time in years, if at all.

My mysterious canvas, worn
 by years & weather & travel. Your face
 softer, center of the tree's trunk,
 & the seething images around you.
 I talk to you, quietly, when alone,
 tell you secret things, a lonely heart's things.

As I set out the treasures I've collected
 on our travels, packed away for so long,
 I describe to you why each choice.
 You listen. Your seething companions listen.
 This I know.

This glass vase, small thin neck, translucent
 green. "For when I missed the Sea by
 our years in the White Woods." Set it on
 a small table, very small, next my bed
 of blankets & pillows. Lift it up to study.
 Laugh. "Also for when I missed the trees
 by our years on the Sea."

A round copper metal pot with a cap & a long
 spout. Burnished nigh black. "My mother
 loved little cups of liquid chocolate, bubbling
 hot. Hers not a peddler's trifle like this one."
 I try to remember, precisely, my tent in
 this strange land, years & miles & more.
 Her languid accent spiraling down upon me.
 "A minute more, Franny. Save your tongue."

This onyx figure, figures, twisted lovers
 seeming fused at hands, hips, thighs,
 two women or one with her man, four
 breasts or two & something else; falling
 asleep at study upon this in my hands,
 its uncertain narrative flinging itself
 further in my dreams—

"She lived in my first studio, my lover,
 my servant, my slave, my *something*.
 The only gift my father gave me with
 a smile, assembled, customized by
 his precise hands. He told me a man
 has to learn this way, without consequence,
 without punishment for being green.
 She contained parts from his own,
 as his father had done too with his.
 "When you're ready for the deeper
 mysteries, dis-assemble her, to her case,
 & keep her tucked away for another."

"She molded to my desires yet I taught
 her to be mercurial, elusive,
 grow older, younger, more pliant, more violent,
 with all the whim she possessed.
 I took her apart many times, replaced
 circuits & drives, testing her possibilities.

"I taught her to paint. I taught her
a kind of dreaming mixed of mathematics
& fucking. I built her a curtained
perch in that studio for watching
me fuck other women. Two or three
of them. Watching me paint while
they fucked each other." I stop.

I resume. "I showed her my painting
of the White Birch, my first, my efforts
to restore it, never finished." Saying
what next to you, living in this imitation
of that picture, & yet real, & yet my
friend, companion, *something*, stall.
Say.

"She pointed out the cuts in the picture
were intentional. *Were part of the painting,*
not attacks upon it. That night, I fucked
her in a different way. I gave all of
myself, stripped myself of young, clumsy
lover & melted through her, bubbling
chocolate through her. Then the door opened,
a familiar, half-liked scent. I crawled
from the incineration."

The rest of my rucksack now unpacked in
my cabin below. Even the slouched pink
stone, dark, inert since I left the city,
found my friend, found my brothers.

I set you up on the deck of our ship,
a far corner I'd always used for painting,
though I'd not yet set you up here. My brushes,
my palette of paints. Two days out
to Sea. Nearing the Island. I've never
thought to do this but we're going
there too fast. *This feels like incineration.*

Close my eyes, listening to the choppy
hmmmming of the Wide Wide Sea.
Sniff once, twice, fill my lungs full of
the tangled air, remove my cloak,
take off this strange worn hat I've long
kept, painted in.

Begin to paint, do not open my eyes,
 I begin to paint, I am walking,
 alone, a pathless Woods, no lovers,
 no Brothers, following nobody, followed
 by nobody. Brush swiping canvas
 like I've an additional arm & hand,
 like I am two, one painting, one now running.

Run & run & run, then begin to slow,
 begin to approach, slower now, &
 approaching, coming upon myself,
 & what I am rendering, now just
 one of me again, painting furiously,
 breathless, hurting, I am watching
 it happen, again & again, & painting
 it, how sharp it is, how it slices
 air itself upon its downward fall
 to the log, I follow it through,
 through its slice, renting fibres
 like they too simply cool air, & the blood,

the blood hesitates, a long moment
 before pouring out, spreading on
 the ground, I cry, moan, my eyes
 still shut, paint & paint, relive
 this again & again until I feel
 hands, many hands grasp me,
 my shoulders, my waist, pull
 me from my caging task, smack
 my face to unmask me, cry my
 name again & again. *Franny?*
Franny? Franny?

"Francisco! Wake up! We need you!"



* * * * *



Graham Wilkins: A Remembrance

[Classic Cenacle Fiction]

Graham Wilkins was a satirist born in Northumberland, England, in 1721, of nonconformist parents. Wilkins' work was heralded as the excellence of style in the days of Oliver Goldsmith, and fell into obscurity toward the end of the Victorian era. Wilkins' novel, *House of Suffolk*, written in 1763, may have influenced Washington Irving's sanguine treatment of English rural life in his *Bracebridge Hall*.

In *House of Suffolk*, Squire Charles is the whimsical keeper of a tottering mansion who becomes the victim of his own generosity and gullibility and who, toward the end of this comic novel, nearly loses the estate.

Misunderstanding and naïvete certainly play a role in the unraveling of the plot:

Calm had settled on the Charles household. Mrs. Lucy Charles, who was known to frequent town shops, seeking out the best in French style, came home with a large hat and a blue satin scarf.

In her innocence of the condition of the Charles estate, Mrs. Lucy Charles shrugged off her husband's entreaties toward frugality and went on her merry way.

Wilkins also wrote a diary of anecdotes of times spent in London, including sessions with Jonson's Literary Club. His best style is found there, conveying a sentiment similar to Goldsmith and, later, Irving, but retaining a rich vein of rustic vigor of the kind evidenced in Addison and Steele. Of Wilkins, Dr. Jonson wrote:

He has the dry vein of the humour of Swift. He provides good moral maxims wedded to gentle humour. He lacks the imagination of Addison, but has nearly equal sense of literary turn. Of religion he seems to have none, but neither is irreverent. His only failing is an occasional propensity toward the eccentric in the delineation of character and the turn of a story.

In 1879, Charles Van Dyke, an American critic wrote: "Dr. Wilkins provided the epitome of English prose style."

But with the turn of the present century, the criticism sometimes got nasty. Dr. George P. French wrote in 1922:

He couldn't write. The banal foundation of the horrid Knickerbocker school could be traced in his works. Combined with a singular lack of imagination and literary courage, his House of Suffolk was barely readable. The rest was plain lousy.

But Wilkins's literary reputation has returned to a juster level. We'll return again to *House of Suffolk*:

Occasionally, the Squire Charles would visit the Grey Tankard, the local inn where old songs were sung and local gossip was exchanged. There was a great stir over a young pamphleteer who was mightily enthused over the rumblings in France, predicting hellfire if thorough reform were found wanting. He would walk up to each of the gentlemen of the tavern and ask each his name in a most peculiar manner. This proceeded until the old sire of the tavern managed to calm the fellow down and bring him pleasure at his seat with a tankard of ale.

In Green's *Journal* there was an account of a night not dissimilar from this one in which Wilkins and Goldsmith frequented London's taverns. It appears that Goldsmith borrowed money from Wilkins, and then spent all of it purchasing drinks for Wilkins and himself; what remained he gave to a local beggar.

Wilkins also wrote a series of essays under the pseudonym "Peter Pumpkin, Esq." His essays had a smooth readable prose style though sometimes he got a little dry. Here is an excerpt from one of these essays:

One night, as I was resting, I fell asleep and proceeded into the most unusual dream. I was in a seaside cabin enjoying the hospitality of one Lord Grimsley. He was telling me quite a story about his ancestry, and how the Grimsleys came to their current state. He talked with me about Garrick and London theatre.

It appears there was a fog upon lake, and an assemblage of visitors were expected—but had lost their way. He took all this in good humour, reminding me the fog should be over soon. He said he hoped they wouldn't be long, or that he just might fall asleep right in his elbow chair. "Oh I may be asleep," he hummed softly.

My host then proceeded to fill his tankard with the most unusual liquid—his "tonic," he called it, "recommended to heighten awareness and to cure a variety of ailments."

I sat myself down and took a drink of it. It was quite delicious and it seemed to put me right to sleep. When I awoke, I found myself in a strange, cramped bedroom made of metal. I was with three young gentlemen wearing marching band outfits.

I was conducted to a small upper room with a window through which to peek out. It appears that I was in a metal ship that travelled underwater. And then I was persuaded to sit me down and was told by these good gentlemen that they all lived in a yellow submarine. And most excellent stories were told with the most pertinent maxims.

I awoke in the lord's chambers and was treated to a most excellent discourse on the theology of Mr. Locke. Upon which, I again fell asleep, awaking in my quarters.

Wilkins's essays of this kind had an imaginative streak reminiscent of *The Spectator*.

Here's an account by Wilkins of a stay with Lord Grimsley, published in his 1795 volume of essays and poems:

Lord Grimsley was one of those characters given to long discourse. His treatment of Mr. Locke was most singular. "How can ideas in the mind behave like toy balls, bouncing about the head?" he would surmise.

His accounts would become more instructive as the ale was poured. He told a story about his mother that was most interesting; his filial affection was touching.

On one of my visits, Lord Grimsley got out a violin and played an old ditty. Mr. Chesterton dropped by, and points in theology were reviewed again.

Then Lord Grimsley got out the elixir and we partook, and a young gentleman appeared at the door of a rustic aspect. A travelling player, he rendered this ditty:

*Linkum Fidelus, his book is old and worn
But I saw him walking down the street
Just the other day, looking beat
I said, "Linkum! Linkum Fidelus!
Tell us a story about the boys in Sherwood Forest
Linkum! Linkum Fidelus!
What you gonna do when the world is blue?"
He had cowboy boots with shiny spurs
When he read Shakespeare the kittens would pur
meeee-owwww
He got so funky one time I walked him home
in a nick of time
And I said, "Linkum! Linkum Fidelus!
Tell us about the boys in Sherwood Forest
Linkum! Linkum Fidelus!
What you gonna do when the world is blue?"
He winked at me and tipped his hat
Said he's gonna find where his book is at
Oh man—Linkum was the very best*

When that reverie had passed, the assemblage agreed not, henceforth, to risk partaking of Lord Grimsley's tonic before supper.

Mr. Wilkins outlived Dr. Jonson and Goldsmith, and eulogized both of them. He provides this account of an encounter with the good Dr. Jonson when the Doctor's health was failing:

The Doctor and I took a long walk on a gentle hillside. We turned to the subject of Goldy and the passing of time, looking lovingly over the estate and the rolling hills.

"Goldy had said that, 'Sir, luxury will be the ruin of England,'" I said.

Dr. Jonson replied, "Sir, no luxury canneth ruin a people. It all depends on the condition of their souls."

"I would hope to look at the passing of time without regret," continued the Doctor. "My peace, Sir, comes with the prospect of a future state."

Upon which, the good Doctor and I returned to a local inn and proceeded to work on the consumption of ale.

I wrote these lines: "here lies Goldsmith / if you can beat him / if he were Spam / I surely would eat him."

And Jonson finished it off: "if I could be honest / if you could be true / then Goldsmith's dish / would taste like you."

Graham Wilkins died in London on November 26, 1799, flat broke, but still a local favorite.

List of Works

1. *House of Suffolk*, 1763.
2. *Peter Pumpkin Papers*, 1765.
3. *The Canterbury Inn*, 1768.
4. *The Friar's Anecdote*, 1769.
5. Editor of *The Scribbler*, 1770-1771.
6. *The Two Wives*, 1774.
7. *Journal on Literary Travels*, 1787.
8. *Book of Essays and Poems*, 1795.

* * * * *



Martina Newberry



RSVP Marcella

"I know the kind of music they play there and it's not the kind of music I like . . ."

Amy Huizenga, friend of Casey Anthony, regarding a bar.

Begin outside where
you can see the Griffith Park
Observatory, the whiteness of it
bouncing light—air's baby—on

its knee. Begin where
your bare feet touch the
concrete verandah, object
to its rough ridges

and small fissures. Begin with
your morning wish that you could
paint or draw or play
an easily-moved

musical instrument or
coax clay into a
tall pot, fabric in
to a dress, anything but

write poetry for
godssakes. Mud-wrestling
words, taking them to the mat,
show with poor language

what ought to be viewed
by an X-ray machine. Yes,
that's where to begin:
poor, tarnished language, too frail

to enclose or bear
 your sick anger. Best
 to sit in one of two gray
 chairs which point “out there,”

respect the jut of
 your jaw, your rage at why these
 things happen, and why to her?
 Inside your head, they take
 her from bed to the front door,
 down the steps, to the
 waiting van. “Don’t watch
 us take her out,” the man tells

her husband. “Don’t watch!”
 Sweet Baby Jesus!
 Thirty-five years of real talk
 and now she is still.

Under her lids, her eyes
 shine cool like opals.
 Sweet Baby Jesus!
 My darling, my friend,

my dear, I can’t cry though your
 ghost touches my face
 and offers me a
 tissue from the bottom of

a canvas tote.
 Here is afternoon.
 Here is confirmation that
 it’s true and awful.

You surrendered that
 sexy swagger way too soon.
 One small squeak of a bedspring
 and you were gone.

And the balance of my days
was gone, Marcella,
I beg you . . . put on
that green silk dress with cap sleeves,

Share this drink with me.
Meet me tonight at
Hyatt House in the cheap bar,
well drinks two-for-one.

Sing “Seems Like Old Times”—
the piano man
and I will hum along with.

I don’t think I can
walk these paths with a pain
more alive than you are.

* * * * *







The Doors of Perception

[Classic Essay]

First published in Great Britain by Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1954.

*If the doors of perception were cleansed
everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.*
—William Blake

It was in 1886 that the German pharmacologist, Louis Lewin, published the first systematic study of the cactus, to which his own name was subsequently given. *Anhalonium lewinii* was new to science. To primitive religion and the Indians of Mexico and the American Southwest it was a friend of immemorially long standing. Indeed, it was much more than a friend. In the words of one of the early Spanish visitors to the New World, “they eat a root which they call peyote, and which they venerate as though it were a deity.”

Why they should have venerated it as a deity became apparent when such eminent psychologists as Jaensch, Havelock Ellis and Weir Mitchell began their experiments with mescaline, the active principle of peyote. True, they stopped short at a point well this side of idolatry; but all concurred in assigning to mescaline a position among drugs of unique distinction. Administered in suitable doses, it changes the quality of consciousness more profoundly and yet is less toxic than any other substance in the pharmacologist's repertory.

Mescaline research has been going on sporadically ever since the days of Lewin and Havelock Ellis. Chemists have not merely isolated the alkaloid; they have learned how to synthesize it, so that the supply no longer depends on the sparse and intermittent crop of a desert cactus. Alienists have dosed themselves with mescaline in the hope thereby of coming to a better, a first-hand, understanding of their patients' mental processes. Working unfortunately upon too few subjects within too narrow a range of circumstances, psychologists have observed and catalogued some of the drug's more striking effects. Neurologists and physiologists have found out something about the mechanism of its action upon the central nervous system. And at least one professional philosopher has taken mescaline for the light it may throw on such ancient, unsolved riddles as the place of mind in nature and the relationship between brain and consciousness.

There matters rested until, two or three years ago, a new and perhaps highly significant fact was observed.¹ Actually the fact had been staring everyone in the face for several decades; but nobody, as it happened, had noticed it until a young English psychiatrist, at present working in Canada, was struck by the close similarity, in chemical composition, between mescaline and adrenaline. Further research revealed that lysergic acid, an extremely potent hallucinogen derived from ergot, has a structural biochemical relationship to the others. Then came the discovery that adrenochrome, which is a product of the decomposition of adrenaline, can produce many of the symptoms observed in mescaline intoxication. But adrenochrome probably occurs spontaneously in the human body. In other words, each one of us may be capable of manufacturing a chemical, minute doses of which are known to cause profound changes in consciousness. Certain of these changes are similar to those which occur in that most characteristic plague of the twentieth century, schizophrenia. Is the mental disorder due to a chemical disorder? And is the chemical disorder due, in its turn, to psychological distresses affecting

the adrenals? It would be rash and premature to affirm it. The most we can say is that some kind of a *prima facie* case has been made out. Meanwhile the clue is being systematically followed, the sleuths—biochemists, psychiatrists, psychologists—are on the trail.

By a series of, for me, extremely fortunate circumstances I found myself, in the spring of 1953, squarely athwart that trail. One of the sleuths had come on business to California. In spite of seventy years of mescaline research, the psychological material at his disposal was still absurdly inadequate, and he was anxious to add to it. I was on the spot and willing, indeed eager, to be a guinea pig. Thus it came about that, one bright May morning, I swallowed four-tenths of a gram of mescaline dissolved in half a glass of water and sat down to wait for the results.

We live together, we act on, and react to, one another; but always and in all circumstances we are by ourselves. The martyrs go hand in hand into the arena; they are crucified alone. Embraced, the lovers desperately try to fuse their insulated ecstasies into a single self-transcendence; in vain. By its very nature every embodied spirit is doomed to suffer and enjoy in solitude. Sensations, feelings, insights, fancies—all these are private and, except through symbols and at second hand, incommunicable. We can pool information about experiences, but never the experiences themselves. From family to nation, every human group is a society of island universes.

Most island universes are sufficiently like one another to permit of inferential understanding or even of mutual empathy or “feeling into.” Thus, remembering our own bereavements and humiliations, we can condole with others in analogous circumstances, can put ourselves (always, of course, in a slightly Pickwickian sense) in their places. But in certain cases communication between universes is incomplete or even nonexistent. The mind is its own place, and the places inhabited by the insane and the exceptionally gifted are so different from the places where ordinary men and women live, that there is little or no common ground of memory to serve as a basis for understanding or fellow feeling. Words are uttered, but fail to enlighten. The things and events to which the symbols refer belong to mutually exclusive realms of experience.

To see ourselves as others see us is a most salutary gift. Hardly less important is the capacity to see others as they see themselves. But what if these others belong to a different species and inhabit a radically alien universe? For example, how can the sane get to know what it actually feels like to be mad? Or, short of being born again as a visionary, a medium, or a musical genius, how can we ever visit the worlds which, to Blake, to Swedenborg, to Johann Sebastian Bach, were home? And how can a man at the extreme limits of ectomorphy and cerebrotonia ever put himself in the place of one at the limits of endomorphy and viscerotonia, or, except within certain circumscribed areas, share the feelings of one who stands at the limits of mesomorphy and somatotonia? To the unmitigated behaviorist such questions, I suppose, are meaningless. But for those who theoretically believe what in practice they know to be true—namely, that there is an inside to experience as well as an outside—the problems posed are real problems, all the more grave for being, some completely insoluble, some soluble only in exceptional circumstances and by methods not available to everyone. Thus, it seems virtually certain that I shall never know what it feels like to be Sir John Falstaff or Joe Louis. On the other hand, it had always seemed to me possible that, through hypnosis, for example, or auto-hypnosis, by means of systematic meditation, or else by taking the appropriate drug, I might so change my ordinary mode of consciousness as to be able to know, from the inside, what the visionary, the medium, even the mystic were talking about.

From what I had read of the mescaline experience I was convinced in advance that the drug would admit me, at least for a few hours, into the kind of inner world described by Blake and AE. But what I had expected did not happen. I had expected to lie with my eyes shut, looking at visions of many-colored geometries, of animated architectures, rich with gems and fabulously lovely, of landscapes with heroic figures, of symbolic dramas trembling perpetually on the verge of the ultimate revelation. But I had not reckoned, it was evident, with the idiosyncrasies of my mental make-up, the facts of my temperament, training and habits.

I am and, for as long as I can remember, I have always been a poor visualizer. Words, even the pregnant words of poets, do not evoke pictures in my mind. No hypnagogic visions greet me on the verge of sleep. When I recall something, the memory does not present itself to me as a vividly seen event or object. By an effort of the will, I can evoke a not very vivid image of what happened yesterday afternoon, of how the Lungarno used to look before the bridges were destroyed, of the Bayswater Road when the only buses were green and tiny and drawn by aged horses at three and a half miles an hour. But such images have little substance and absolutely no autonomous life of their own. They stand to real, perceived objects in the same relation as Homer's ghosts stood to the men of flesh and blood, who came to visit them in the shades. Only when I have a high temperature do my mental images come to independent life. To those in whom the faculty of visualization is strong my inner world must seem curiously drab, limited and uninteresting. This was the world—a poor thing but my own—which I expected to see transformed into something completely unlike itself.

The change which actually took place in that world was in no sense revolutionary. Half an hour after swallowing the drug I became aware of a slow dance of golden lights. A little later there were sumptuous red surfaces swelling and expanding from bright nodes of energy that vibrated with a continuously changing, patterned life. At another time the closing of my eyes revealed a complex of gray structures, within which pale bluish spheres kept emerging into intense solidity and, having emerged, would slide noiselessly upwards, out of sight. But at no time were there faces or forms of men or animals. I saw no landscapes, no enormous spaces, no magical growth and metamorphosis of buildings, nothing remotely like a drama or a parable. The other world to which mescaline admitted me was not the world of visions; it existed out there, in what I could see with my eyes open. The great change was in the realm of objective fact. What had happened to my subjective universe was relatively unimportant.

I took my pill at eleven. An hour and a half later, I was sitting in my study, looking intently at a small glass vase. The vase contained only three flowers—a full-blown Belie of Portugal rose, shell pink with a hint at every petal's base of a hotter, flammier hue; a large magenta and cream-colored carnation; and, pale purple at the end of its broken stalk, the bold heraldic blossom of an iris. Fortuitous and provisional, the little nosegay broke all the rules of traditional good taste. At breakfast that morning I had been struck by the lively dissonance of its colors. But that was no longer the point. I was not looking now at an unusual flower arrangement. I was seeing what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation—the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence.

"Is it agreeable?" somebody asked. (During this part of the experiment, all conversations were recorded on a dictating machine, and it has been possible for me to refresh my memory of what was said.)

"Neither agreeable nor disagreeable," I answered. "it just is."

Istigkeit—wasn't that the word Meister Eckhart liked to use? "Is-ness." The Being of Platonic philosophy—except that Plato seems to have made the enormous, the grotesque mistake of separating Being from becoming and identifying it with the mathematical abstraction of the Idea. He could never, poor fellow, have seen a bunch of flowers shining with their own inner light and all but quivering under the pressure of the significance with which they were charged; could never have perceived that what rose and iris and carnation so intensely signified was nothing more, and nothing less, than what they were—a transience that was yet eternal life, a perpetual perishing that was at the same time pure Being, a bundle of minute, unique particulars in which, by some unspeakable and yet self-evident paradox, was to be seen the divine source of all existence.

I continued to look at the flowers, and in their living light I seemed to detect the qualitative equivalent of breathing—but of a breathing without returns to a starting point, with no recurrent ebbs but only a repeated flow from beauty to heightened beauty, from deeper to ever deeper meaning. Words like "grace" and "transfiguration" came to my mind, and this, of course, was what, among other things, they stood for. My eyes traveled from the rose to the carnation, and from that feathery incandescence

to the smooth scrolls of sentient amethyst which were the iris. The Beatific Vision, Sat Chit Ananda, Being-Awareness-Bliss-for the first time I understood, not on the verbal level, not by inchoate hints or at a distance, but precisely and completely what those prodigious syllables referred to. And then I remembered a passage I had read in one of Suzuki's essays. "What is the Dharma-Body of the Buddha?" ("the Dharma-Body of the Buddha" is another way of saying Mind, Suchness, the Void, the Godhead.) The question is asked in a Zen monastery by an earnest and bewildered novice. And with the prompt irrelevance of one of the Marx Brothers, the Master answers, "The hedge at the bottom of the garden." "And the man who realizes this truth," the novice dubiously inquires, "what, may I ask, is he?" Groucho gives him a whack over the shoulders with his staff and answers, "A golden-haired lion."

It had been, when I read it, only a vaguely pregnant piece of nonsense. Now it was all as clear as day, as evident as Euclid. Of course the Dharma-Body of the Buddha was the hedge at the bottom of the garden. At the same time, and no less obviously, it was these flowers, it was anything that I—or rather the blessed Not-I, released for a moment from my throttling embrace—cared to look at. The books, for example, with which my study walls were lined. Like the flowers, they glowed, when I looked at them, with brighter colors, a profounder significance. Red books, like rubies; emerald books; books bound in white jade; books of agate; of aquamarine, of yellow topaz; lapis lazuli books whose color was so intense, so intrinsically meaningful, that they seemed to be on the point of leaving the shelves to thrust themselves more insistently on my attention.

"What about spatial relationships?" the investigator inquired, as I was looking at the books.

It was difficult to answer. True, the perspective looked rather odd, and the walls of the room no longer seemed to meet in right angles. But these were not the really important facts. The really important facts were that spatial relationships had ceased to matter very much and that my mind was perceiving the world in terms of other than spatial categories. At ordinary times the eye concerns itself with such problems as *Where?—How far?—How situated in relation to what?* In the mescaline experience the implied questions to which the eye responds are of another order. Place and distance cease to be of much interest. The mind does its perceiving in terms of intensity of existence, profundity of significance, relationships within a pattern. I saw the books, but was not at all concerned with their positions in space. What I noticed, what impressed itself upon my mind was the fact that all of them glowed with living light and that in some the glory was more manifest than in others. In this context position and the three dimensions were beside the point. Not, of course, that the category of space had been abolished. When I got up and walked about, I could do so quite normally, without misjudging the whereabouts of objects. Space was still there; but it had lost its predominance. The mind was primarily concerned, not with measures and locations, but with being and meaning.

And along with indifference to space there went an even more complete indifference to time.

"There seems to be plenty of it," was all I would answer, when the investigator asked me to say what I felt about time.

Plenty of it, but exactly how much was entirely irrelevant. I could, of course, have looked at my watch; but my watch, I knew, was in another universe. My actual experience had been, was still, of an indefinite duration or alternatively of a perpetual present made up of one continually changing apocalypse.

From the books the investigator directed my attention to the furniture. A small typing table stood in the center of the room; beyond it, from my point of view, was a wicker chair and beyond that a desk. The three pieces formed an intricate pattern of horizontals, uprights and diagonals—a pattern all the more interesting for not being interpreted in terms of spatial relationships. Table, chair and desk came together in a composition that was like something by Braque or Juan Gris, a still life recognizably related to the objective world, but rendered without depth, without any attempt at photographic realism. I was looking at my furniture, not as the utilitarian who has to sit on chairs, to write at desks and tables, and not as the cameraman or scientific recorder, but as the pure aesthete whose concern is only with forms and their relationships within the field of vision or the picture space. But as I looked,

this purely aesthetic, Cubist's-eye view gave place to what I can only describe as the sacramental vision of reality. I was back where I had been when I was looking at the flowers—back in a world where everything shone with the Inner Light, and was infinite in its significance. The legs, for example, of that chair—how miraculous their tubularity, how supernatural their polished smoothness! I spent several minutes—or was it several centuries?—not merely gazing at those bamboo legs, but actually being them—or rather being myself in them; or, to be still more accurate (for “I” was not involved in the case, nor in a certain sense were “they”) being my Not-self in the Not-self which was the chair.

Reflecting on my experience, I find myself agreeing with the eminent Cambridge philosopher, Dr. C. D. Broad, “that we should do well to consider much more seriously than we have hitherto been inclined to do the type of theory which Bergson put forward in connection with memory and sense perception. The suggestion is that the function of the brain and nervous system and sense organs is in the main eliminative and not productive. Each person is at each moment capable of remembering all that has ever happened to him and of perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe. The function of the brain and nervous system is to protect us from being overwhelmed and confused by this mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge, by shutting out most of what we should otherwise perceive or remember at any moment, and leaving only that very small and special selection which is likely to be practically useful.” According to such a theory, each one of us is potentially Mind at Large. But in so far as we are animals, our business is at all costs to survive. To make biological survival possible, Mind at Large has to be funneled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system. What comes out at the other end is a measly trickle of the kind of consciousness which will help us to stay alive on the surface of this particular planet. To formulate and express the contents of this reduced awareness, man has invented and endlessly elaborated those symbol-systems and implicit philosophies which we call languages. Every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the linguistic tradition into which he has been born—the beneficiary inasmuch as language gives access to the accumulated records of other people's experience, the victim in so far as it confirms him in the belief that reduced awareness is the only awareness and as it bedevils his sense of reality, so that he is all too apt to take his concepts for data, his words for actual things. That which, in the language of religion, is called “this world” is the universe of reduced awareness, expressed, and, as it were, petrified by language. The various “other worlds,” with which human beings erratically make contact are so many elements in the totality of the awareness belonging to Mind at Large. Most people, most of the time, know only what comes through the reducing valve and is consecrated as genuinely real by the local language. Certain persons, however, seem to be born with a kind of by-pass that circumvents the reducing valve. In others temporary by-passes may be acquired either spontaneously, or as the result of deliberate “spiritual exercises,” or through hypnosis, or by means of drugs. Through these permanent or temporary by-passes there flows, not indeed the perception “of everything that is happening everywhere in the universe” (for the by-pass does not abolish the reducing valve, which still excludes the total content of Mind at Large), but something more than, and above all something different from, the carefully selected utilitarian material which our narrowed, individual minds regard as a complete, or at least sufficient, picture of reality.

The brain is provided with a number of enzyme systems which serve to co-ordinate its workings. Some of these enzymes regulate the supply of glucose to the brain cells. Mescaline inhibits the production of these enzymes and thus lowers the amount of glucose available to an organ that is in constant need of sugar. When mescaline reduces the brain's normal ration of sugar what happens? Too few cases have been observed, and therefore a comprehensive answer cannot yet be given. But what happens to the majority of the few who have taken mescaline under supervision can be summarized as follows.

(1) The ability to remember and to “think straight” is little if at all reduced. (Listening to the recordings of my conversation under the influence of the drug, I cannot discover that I was then any stupider than I am at ordinary times.)



(2) Visual impressions are greatly intensified and the eye recovers some of the perceptual innocence of childhood, when the sensum was not immediately and automatically subordinated to the concept. Interest in space is diminished and interest in time falls almost to zero.

(3) Though the intellect remains unimpaired and though perception is enormously improved, the will suffers a profound change for the worse. The mescaline taker sees no reason for doing anything in particular and finds most of the causes for which, at ordinary times, he was prepared to act and suffer, profoundly uninteresting. He can't be bothered with them, for the good reason that he has better things to think about.

(4) These better things may be experienced (as I experienced them) "out there," or "in here," or in both worlds, the inner and the outer, simultaneously or successively. That they are better seems to be self-evident to all mescaline takers who come to the drug with a sound liver and an untroubled mind.

These effects of mescaline are the sort of effects you could expect to follow the administration of a drug having the power to impair the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve. When the brain runs out of sugar, the undernourished ego grows weak, can't be bothered to undertake the necessary chores, and loses all interest in those spatial and temporal relationships which mean so much to an organism bent on getting on in the world. As Mind at Large seeps past the no longer watertight valve, all kinds of biologically useless things start to happen. In some cases there may be extra-sensory perceptions. Other persons discover a world of visionary beauty. To others again is revealed the glory, the infinite value and meaningfulness of naked existence, of the given, unconceptualized event. In the final stage of egolessness there is an "obscure knowledge" that All is in all—that All is actually each. This is as near, I take it, as a finite mind can ever come to "perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe."

In this context, how significant is the enormous heightening, under mescaline, of the perception of color! For certain animals it is biologically very important to be able to distinguish certain hues. But beyond the limits of their utilitarian spectrum, most creatures are completely color blind. Bees, for example, spend most of their time "deflowering the fresh virgins of the spring"; but, as Von Frisch has shown, they can recognize only a very few colors. Man's highly developed color sense is a biological luxury—ineestimably precious to him as an intellectual and spiritual being, but unnecessary to his survival as an animal. To judge by the adjectives which Homer puts into their mouths, the heroes of the Trojan War hardly excelled the bees in their capacity to distinguish colors. In this respect, at least, mankind's advance has been prodigious.

Mescaline raises all colors to a higher power and makes the percipient aware of innumerable fine shades of difference, to which, at ordinary times, he is completely blind. It would seem that, for Mind at Large, the so-called secondary characters of things are primary. Unlike Locke, it evidently feels that colors are more important, better worth attending to, than masses, positions and dimensions. Like mescaline takers, many mystics perceive supernaturally brilliant colors, not only with the inward eye, but even in the objective world around them. Similar reports are made by psychics and sensitives. There are certain mediums to whom the mescaline taker's brief revelation is a matter, during long periods, of daily and hourly experience.

From this long but indispensable excursion into the realm of theory, we may now return to the miraculous facts—four bamboo chair legs in the middle of a room. Like Wordsworth's daffodils, they brought all manner of wealth—the gift, beyond price, of a new direct insight into the very Nature of Things, together with a more modest treasure of understanding in the field, especially, of the arts.

A rose is a rose is a rose. But these chair legs were chair legs were St. Michael and all angels. Four or five hours after the event, when the effects of a cerebral sugar shortage were wearing off, I was taken for a little tour of the city, which included a visit, towards sundown, to what is modestly claimed to be the World's Biggest Drug Store. At the back of the W.B.D.S., among the toys, the greeting cards and the comics, stood a row, surprisingly enough, of art books. I picked up the first volume that came to hand. It was on Van Gogh, and the picture at which the book opened was "The Chair"—that astounding

portrait of a *Ding an Sich*, which the mad painter saw, with a kind of adoring terror, and tried to render on his canvas. But it was a task to which the power even of genius proved wholly inadequate. The chair Van Gogh had seen was obviously the same in essence as the chair I had seen. But, though incomparably more real than the chairs of ordinary perception, the chair in his picture remained no more than an unusually expressive symbol of the fact. The fact had been manifested Suchness; this was only an emblem. Such emblems are sources of true knowledge about the Nature of Things, and this true knowledge may serve to prepare the mind which accepts it for immediate insights on its own account. But that is all. However expressive, symbols can never be the things they stand for.

It would be interesting, in this context, to make a study of the works of art available to the great knowers of Suchness. What sort of pictures did Eckhart look at? What sculptures and paintings played a part in the religious experience of St. John of the Cross, of Hakuin, of Hui-neng, of William Law? The questions are beyond my power to answer; but I strongly suspect that most of the great knowers of Suchness paid very little attention to art—some refusing to have anything to do with it at all, others being content with what a critical eye would regard as second-rate, or even, tenth-rate, works. (To a person whose transfigured and transfiguring mind can see the All in every this, the first-rateness or tenth-rateness of even a religious painting will be a matter of the most sovereign indifference.) Art, I suppose, is only for beginners, or else for those resolute dead-enders, who have made up their minds to be content with the ersatz of Suchness, with symbols rather than with what they signify, with the elegantly composed recipe in lieu of actual dinner.

I returned the Van Gogh to its rack and picked up the volume standing next to it. It was a book on Botticelli. I turned the pages. “The Birth of Venus”—never one of my favorites. “Mars and Venus,” that loveliness so passionately denounced by poor Ruskin at the height of his long-drawn sexual tragedy. The marvelously rich and intricate “Calumny of Apelles.” And then a somewhat less familiar and not very good picture, “Judith.” My attention was arrested and I gazed in fascination, not at the pale neurotic heroine or her attendant, not at the victim’s hairy head or the vernal landscape in the background, but at the purplish silk of Judith’s pleated bodice and long wind-blown skirts.

This was something I had seen before—seen that very morning, between the flowers and the furniture, when I looked down by chance, and went on passionately staring by choice, at my own crossed legs. Those folds in the trousers—what a labyrinth of endlessly significant complexity! And the texture of the gray flannel—how rich, how deeply, mysteriously sumptuous! And here they were again, in Botticelli’s picture.

Civilized human beings wear clothes, therefore there can be no portraiture, no mythological or historical storytelling without representations of folded textiles. But though it may account for the origins, mere tailoring can never explain the luxuriant development of drapery as a major theme of all the plastic arts. Artists, it is obvious, have always loved drapery for its own sake—or, rather, for their own. When you paint or carve drapery, you are painting or carving forms which, for all practical purposes, are non-representational—the kind of unconditioned forms on which artists even in the most naturalistic tradition like to let themselves go. In the average Madonna or Apostle the strictly human, fully representational element accounts for about ten per cent of the whole. All the rest consists of many colored variations on the inexhaustible theme of crumpled wool or linen. And these non-representational nine-tenths of a Madonna or an Apostle may be just as important qualitatively as they are in quantity. Very often they set the tone of the whole work of art, they state the key in which the theme is being rendered, they express the mood, the temperament, the attitude to life of the artist. Stoical serenity reveals itself in the smooth surfaces, the broad untortured folds of Piero’s draperies. Torn between fact and wish, between cynicism and idealism, Bernini tempers the all but caricatural verisimilitude of his faces with enormous sartorial abstractions, which are the embodiment, in stone or bronze, of the everlasting commonplaces of rhetoric—the heroism, the holiness, the sublimity to which mankind perpetually aspires, for the most part in vain. And here are El Greco’s disquietingly visceral skirts and mantles; here are the sharp, twisting, flame-like folds in which Cosimo Tura clothes his

figures: in the first, traditional spirituality breaks down into a nameless physiological yearning; in the second, there writhes an agonized sense of the world's essential strangeness and hostility. Or consider Watteau; his men and women play lutes, get ready for balls and harlequinades, embark, on velvet lawns and under noble trees, for the Cythera of every lover's dream; their enormous melancholy and the flayed, excruciating sensibility of their creator find expression, not in the actions recorded, not in the gestures and the faces portrayed, but in the relief and texture of their taffeta skirts, their satin capes and doublets. Not an inch of smooth surface here, not a moment of peace or confidence, only a silken wilderness of countless tiny pleats and wrinkles, with an incessant modulation—inner uncertainty rendered with the perfect assurance of a master hand—of tone into tone, of one indeterminate color into another. In life, man proposes, God disposes. In the plastic arts the proposing is done by the subject matter; that which disposes is ultimately the artist's temperament, proximately (at least in portraiture, history and genre) the carved or painted drapery. Between them, these two may decree that a *fête galante* shall move to tears, that a crucifixion shall be serene to the point of cheerfulness, that a stigmatization shall be almost intolerably sexy, that the likeness of a prodigy of female brainlessness (I am thinking now of Ingres' incomparable Mme. Moitessier) shall express the austerest, the most uncompromising intellectuality.

But this is not the whole story. Draperies, as I had now discovered, are much more than devices for the introduction of non-representational forms into naturalistic paintings and sculptures. What the rest of us see only under the influence of mescaline, the artist is congenitally equipped to see all the time. His perception is not limited to what is biologically or socially useful. A little of the knowledge belonging to Mind at Large oozes past the reducing valve of brain and ego, into his consciousness. It is a knowledge of the intrinsic significance of every existent. For the artist as for the mescaline taker draperies are living hieroglyphs that stand in some peculiarly expressive way for the unfathomable mystery of pure being. More even than the chair, though less perhaps than those wholly supernatural flowers, the folds of my gray flannel trousers were charged with "is-ness." To what they owed this privileged status, I cannot say. Is it, perhaps, because the forms of folded drapery are so strange and dramatic that they catch the eye and in this way force the miraculous fact of sheer existence upon the attention? Who knows? What is important is less the reason for the experience than the experience itself. Poring over Judith's skirts, there in the World's Biggest Drug Store, I knew that Botticelli—and not Botticelli alone, but many others too—had looked at draperies with the same transfigured and transfiguring eyes as had been mine that morning. They had seen the *Istigkeit*, the Allness and Infinity of folded cloth and had done their best to render it in paint or stone. Necessarily, of course, without success. For the glory and the wonder of pure existence belong to another order, beyond the power of even the highest art to express. But in Judith's skirt I could clearly see what, if I had been a painter of genius, I might have made of my old gray flannels. Not much, heaven knows, in comparison with the reality, but enough to delight generation after generation of beholders, enough to make them understand at least a little of the true significance of what, in our pathetic imbecility, we call "mere things" and disregard in favor of television.

"This is how one ought to see," I kept saying as I looked down at my trousers, or glanced at the jeweled books in the shelves, at the legs of my infinitely more than Van-Goghian chair. "This is how one ought to see, how things really are." And yet there were reservations. For if one always saw like this, one would never want to do anything else. Just looking, just being the divine Not-self of flower, of book, of chair, of flannel. That would be enough. But in that case what about other people? What about human relations? In the recording of that morning's conversations I find the question constantly repeated, "What about human relations?" How could one reconcile this timeless bliss of seeing as one ought to see with the temporal duties of doing what one ought to do and feeling as one ought to feel? "One ought to be able," I said, "to see these trousers as infinitely important and human beings as still more infinitely important." One ought—but in practice it seemed to be impossible. This participation in the manifest glory of things left no room, so to speak, for the ordinary, the necessary concerns of human existence, above all for concerns involving persons. For persons are selves and, in one respect at least,

I was now a Not-self, simultaneously perceiving and being the Not-self of the things around me. To this new-born Not-self, the behavior, the appearance, the very thought of the self it had momentarily ceased to be, and of other selves, its one-time fellows, seemed not indeed distasteful (for distastefulness was not one of the categories in terms of which I was thinking), but enormously irrelevant. Compelled by the investigator to analyze and report on what I was doing (and how I longed to be left alone with Eternity in a flower, Infinity in four chair legs and the Absolute in the folds of a pair of flannel trousers!), I realized that I was deliberately avoiding the eyes of those who were with me in the room, deliberately refraining from being too much aware of them. One was my wife, the other a man I respected and greatly liked; but both belonged to the world from which, for the moment, mescaline had delivered me—world of selves, of time, of moral judgments and utilitarian considerations, the world (and it was this aspect of human life which I wished, above all else, to forget) of self-assertion, of cocksureness, of overvalued words and idolatrously worshipped notions.

At this stage of the proceedings I was handed a large colored reproduction of the well-known self-portrait by Cézanne—the head and shoulders of a man in a large straw hat, red-cheeked, red-lipped, with rich black whiskers and a dark unfriendly eye. It is a magnificent painting; but it was not as a painting that I now saw it. For the head promptly took on a third dimension and came to life as a small goblin-like man looking out through a window in the page before me. I started to laugh. And when they asked me why, “What pretensions!” I kept repeating. “Who on earth does he think he is?” The question was not addressed to Cézanne in particular, but to the human species at large. Who did they all think they were?

“It’s like Arnold Bennett in the Dolomites,” I said, suddenly remembering a scene, happily immortalized in a snapshot, of A.B., some four or five years before his death, toddling along a wintry road at Cortina d’Ampezzo. Around him lay the virgin snow; in the background was a more than gothic aspiration of red crags. And there was dear, kind, unhappy A.B., consciously overacting the role of his favorite character in fiction, himself, the Card in person. There he went, toddling slowly in the bright Alpine sunshine, his thumbs in the armholes of a yellow waistcoat which bulged, a little lower down, with the graceful curve of a Regency bow window at Brighton—his head thrown back as though to aim some stammered utterance, howitzer-like, at the blue dome of heaven. What he actually said, I have forgotten; but what his whole manner, air and posture fairly shouted was, “I’m as good as those damned mountains.” And in some ways, of course, he was infinitely better; but not, as he knew very well, in the way his favorite character in fiction liked to imagine.

Successfully (whatever that may mean) or unsuccessfully, we all overact the part of our favorite character in fiction. And the fact, the almost infinitely unlikely fact, of actually being Cézanne makes no difference. For the consummate painter, with his little pipeline to Mind at Large by-passing the brain valve and ego-filter, was also and just as genuinely this whiskered goblin with the unfriendly eye.

For relief I turned back to the folds in my trousers. “This is how one ought to see,” I repeated yet again. And I might have added, “These are the sort of things one ought to look at.” Things without pretensions, satisfied to be merely themselves, sufficient in their Suchness, not acting a part, not trying, insanely, to go it alone, in isolation from the Dharma-Body, in Luciferian defiance of the grace of God.

“The nearest approach to this,” I said, “would be a Vermeer.”

Yes, a Vermeer. For that mysterious artist was truly gifted—with the vision that perceives the Dharma-Body as the hedge at the bottom of the garden, with the talent to render as much of that vision as the limitations of human capacity permit, and with the prudence to confine himself in his paintings to the more manageable aspects of reality; for though Vermeer represented human beings, he was always a painter of still life. Cézanne, who told his female sitters to do their best to look like apples, tried to paint portraits in the same spirit. But his pippin-like women are more nearly related to Plato’s Ideas than to the Dharma-Body in the hedge. They are Eternity and Infinity seen, not in sand or flower, but in the abstractions of some very superior brand of geometry. Vermeer never asked his girls to look like apples. On the contrary, he insisted on their being girls to the very limit—but always

with the proviso that they refrain from behaving girlishly. They might sit or quietly stand but never giggle, never display self-consciousness, never say their prayers or pine for absent sweethearts, never gossip, never gaze enviously at other women's babies, never dirt, never love or hate or work. In the act of doing any of these things they would doubtless become more intensely themselves, but would cease, for that very reason, to manifest their divine essential Not-self. In Blake's phrase, the doors of Vermeer's perception were only partially cleansed. A single panel had become almost perfectly transparent; the rest of the door was still muddy. The essential Not-self could be perceived very clearly in things and in living creatures on the hither side of good and evil. In human beings it was visible only when they were in repose, their minds untroubled, their bodies motionless. In these circumstances Vermeer could see Suchness in all its heavenly beauty—could see and, in some small measure, render it—in a subtle and sumptuous still life. Vermeer is undoubtedly the greatest painter of human still lives. But there have been others, for example, Vermeer's French contemporaries, the Le Nain brothers. They set out, I suppose, to be genre painters; but what they actually produced was a series of human still lives, in which their cleansed perception of the infinite significance of all things is rendered not, as with Vermeer, by subtle enrichment of color and texture, but by a heightened clarity, an obsessive distinctness of form, within an austere, almost monochromatic tonality. In our own day we have had Vuillard, the painter, at his best, of unforgettably splendid pictures of the Dharma-Body manifested in a bourgeois bedroom, of the Absolute blazing away in the midst of some stockbroker's family in a suburban garden, taking tea.

*Ce qui fait que l'ancien bandagiste renie
Le comptoir dont le faste alléchait les passants,
C'est son jardin d'Auteuil, où, veufs de tout encens,
Les Zinnias ont l'air d'être en tôle vernie.*

For Laurent Taillade the spectacle was merely obscene. But if the retired rubber goods merchant had sat still enough, Vuillard would have seen in him only the Dharma-Body, would have painted, in the zinnias, the goldfish pool, the villa's Moorish tower and Chinese lanterns, a corner of Eden before the Fall.

But meanwhile my question remained unanswered. How was this cleansed perception to be reconciled with a proper concern with human relations, with the necessary chores and duties, to say nothing of charity and practical compassion? The age-old debate between the actives and the contemplatives was being renewed—renewed, so far as I was concerned, with an unprecedented poignancy. For until this morning I had known contemplation only in its humbler, its more ordinary forms—as discursive thinking; as a rapt absorption in poetry or painting or music; as a patient waiting upon those inspirations, without which even the prosiest writer cannot hope to accomplish anything; as occasional glimpses, in Nature, of Wordsworth's "something far more deeply interfused"; as systematic silence leading, sometimes, to hints of an "obscure knowledge." But now I knew contemplation at its height. At its height, but not yet in its fullness. For in its fullness the way of Mary includes the way of Martha and raises it, so to speak, to its own higher power. Mescaline opens up the way of Mary, but shuts the door on that of Martha. It gives access to contemplation—but to a contemplation that is incompatible with action and even with the will to action, the very thought of action. In the intervals between his revelations the mescaline taker is apt to feel that, though in one way everything is supremely as it should be, in another there is something wrong. His problem is essentially the same as that which confronts the quietist, the *arhat* and, on another level, the landscape painter and the painter of human still lives. Mescaline can never solve that problem; it can only pose it, apocalyptically, for those to whom it had never before presented itself. The full and final solution can be found only by those who are prepared to implement the right kind of *Weltanschauung* by means of the right kind of behavior and the right kind of constant and unstrained alertness. Over against the quietist stands the active-contemplative, the saint, the man who, in Eckhart's phrase, is ready to come down



from the seventh heaven in order to bring a cup of water to his sick brother. Over against the arhat, retreating from appearances into an entirely transcendental Nirvana, stands the Bodhisattva, for whom Suchness and the world of contingencies are one, and for whose boundless compassion every one of those contingencies is an occasion not only for transfiguring insight, but also for the most practical charity. And in the universe of art, over against Vermeer and the other painters of human still lives, over against the masters of Chinese and Japanese landscape painting, over against Constable and Turner, against Sisley and Seurat and Cézanne, stands the all-inclusive art of Rembrandt. These are enormous names, inaccessible eminences. For myself, on this memorable May morning, I could only be grateful for an experience which had shown me, more clearly than I had ever seen it before, the true nature of the challenge and the completely liberating response.

Let me add, before we leave this subject, that there is no form of contemplation, even the most quietistic, which is without its ethical values. Half at least of all morality is negative and consists in keeping out of mischief. The Lord's Prayer is less than fifty words long, and six of those words are devoted to asking God not to lead us into temptation. The one-sided contemplative leaves undone many things that he ought to do; but to make up for it, he refrains from doing a host of things he ought not to do. The sum of evil, Pascal remarked, would be much diminished if men could only learn to sit quietly in their rooms. The contemplative whose perception has been cleansed does not have to stay in his room. He can go about his business, so completely satisfied to see and be a part of the divine Order of Things that he will never even be tempted to indulge in what Traherne called "the dirty Devices of the world." When we feel ourselves to be sole heirs of the universe, when "the sea flows in our veins . . . and the stars are our jewels," when all things are perceived as infinite and holy, what motive can we have for covetousness or self-assertion, for the pursuit of power or the drearier forms of pleasure? Contemplatives are not likely to become gamblers, or procurers, or drunkards; they do not as a rule preach intolerance, or make war; do not find it necessary to rob, swindle or grind the faces of the poor. And to these enormous negative virtues we may add another which, though hard to define, is both positive and important. The arhat and the quietist may not practice contemplation in its fullness; but if they practice it at all, they may bring back enlightening reports of another, a transcendent country of the mind; and if they practice it in the height, they will become conduits through which some beneficent influence can flow out of that other country into a world of darkened selves, chronically dying for lack of it.

Meanwhile I had turned, at the investigator's request, from the portrait of Cézanne to what was going on, inside my head, when I shut my eyes. This time, the inscape was curiously unrewarding. The field of vision was filled with brightly colored, constantly changing structures that seemed to be made of plastic or enameled tin.

"Cheap," I commented. "Trivial. Like things in a five-and-ten." And all this shoddiness existed in a closed, cramped universe. "It's as though one were below decks in a ship," I said. "A five-and-ten-cent ship."

And as I looked, it became very clear that this five-and-ten-cent ship was in some way connected with human pretensions, with the portrait of Cézanne, with A.B. among the Dolomites overacting his favorite character in fiction. This suffocating interior of a dime-store ship was my own personal self; these gimcrack mobiles of tin and plastic were my personal contributions to the universe.

I felt the lesson to be salutary, but was sorry, none the less, that it had had to be administered at this moment and in this form. As a rule the mescaline taker discovers an inner world as manifestly a datum, as self-evidently "infinite and holy," as that transfigured outer world which I had seen with my eyes open. From the first, my own case had been different. Mescaline had endowed me temporarily with the power to see things with my eyes shut; but it could not, or at least on this occasion did not, reveal an inscape remotely comparable to my flowers or chair or flannels "out there." What it had allowed me to perceive inside was not the Dharma-Body, in images, but my own mind; not Suchness, but a set of symbols—in other words, a homemade substitute for Suchness.

Most visualizers are transformed by mescaline into visionaries. Some of them—and they are perhaps more numerous than is generally supposed—require no transformation; they are visionaries all the time. The mental species to which Blake belonged is fairly widely distributed even in the urban-industrial societies of the present day. The poet-artist's uniqueness does not consist in the fact that (to quote from his *Descriptive Catalogue*) he actually saw “those wonderful originals called in the Sacred Scriptures the Cherubim.” It does not consist in the fact that “these wonderful originals seen in my visions, were some of them one hundred feet in height . . . all containing mythological and recondite meaning.” It consists solely in his ability to render, in words or (somewhat less successfully) in line and color, some hint at least of a not excessively uncommon experience. The untalented visionary may perceive an inner reality no less tremendous, beautiful and significant than the world beheld by Blake; but he lacks altogether the ability to express, in literary or plastic symbols, what he has seen.

From the records of religion and the surviving monuments of poetry and the plastic arts it is very plain that, at most times and in most places, men have attached more importance to the inscape than to objective existents, have felt that what they saw with their eyes shut possessed a spiritually higher significance than what they saw with their eyes open. The reason? Familiarity breeds contempt, and how to survive is a problem ranging in urgency from the chronically tedious to the excruciating. The outer world is what we wake up to every morning of our lives, is the place where, willy-nilly, we must try to make our living. In the inner world there is neither work nor monotony. We visit it only in dreams and musings, and its strangeness is such that we never find the same world on two successive occasions. What wonder, then, if human beings in their search for the divine have generally preferred to look within! Generally, but not always. In their art no less than in their religion, the Taoists and the Zen Buddhists looked beyond visions to the Void, and through the Void at “the ten thousand things” of objective reality. Because of their doctrine of the Word made flesh, Christians should have been able, from the first, to adopt a similar attitude towards the universe around them. But because of the doctrine of the Fall, they found it very hard to do so. As recently as three hundred years ago an expression of thoroughgoing world denial and even world condemnation was both orthodox and comprehensible. “We should feel wonder at nothing at all in Nature except only the Incarnation of Christ.” In the seventeenth century, Lallemand's phrase seemed to make sense. Today it has the ring of madness.

In China the rise of landscape painting to the rank of a major art form took place about a thousand, in Japan about six hundred and in Europe about three hundred, years ago. The equation of Dharma-Body with hedge was made by those Zen Masters, who wedded Taoist naturalism with Buddhist transcendentalism. It was, therefore, only in the Far East that landscape painters consciously regarded their art as religious. In the West religious painting was a matter of portraying sacred personages, of illustrating hallowed texts. Landscape painters regarded themselves as secularists. Today we recognize in Seurat one of the supreme masters of what may be called mystical landscape painting. And yet this man who was able, more effectively than any other, to render the One in the many, became quite indignant when somebody praised him for the “poetry” of his work. “I merely apply the System,” he protested. In other words he was merely a pointilliste and, in his own eyes, nothing else. A similar anecdote is told of John Constable. One day towards the end of his life, Blake met Constable at Hampstead and was shown one of the younger artist's sketches. In spite of his contempt for naturalistic art, the old visionary knew a good thing when he saw it—except of course, when it was by Rubens. “This is not drawing,” he cried, “this is inspiration!” “I had meant it to be drawing,” was Constable's characteristic answer. Both men were right. It was drawing, precise and veracious, and at the same time it was inspiration—inspiration of an order at least as high as Blake's. The pine trees on the Heath had actually been seen as identical with the Dharma-Body. The sketch was a rendering, necessarily imperfect but still profoundly impressive, of what a cleansed perception had revealed to the open eyes of a great painter. From a contemplation, in the tradition of Wordsworth and Whitman, of the Dharma-Body as hedge, and from visions, such as Blake's, of the “wonderful originals” within the mind, contemporary poets have retreated into an investigation of the personal, as opposed to the more

than personal, subconscious and to a rendering, in highly abstract terms, not of the given, objective fact, but of mere scientific and theological notions. And something similar has happened in the field of painting, where we have witnessed a general retreat from landscape, the predominant art form of the nineteenth century. This retreat from landscape has not been into that other, inner divine Datum, with which most of the traditional schools of the past were concerned, that Archetypal World, where men have always found the raw materials of myth and religion. No, it has been a retreat from the outward Datum into the personal subconscious, into a mental world more squalid and more tightly closed than even the world of conscious personality. These contraptions of tin and highly colored plastic—where had I seen them before? In every picture gallery that exhibits the latest in nonrepresentational art.

And now someone produced a phonograph and put a record on the turntable. I listened with pleasure, but experienced nothing comparable to my seen apocalypses of flowers or flannel. Would a naturally gifted musician hear the revelations which, for me, had been exclusively visual? It would be interesting to make the experiment. Meanwhile, though not transfigured, though retaining its normal quality and intensity, the music contributed not a little to my understanding of what had happened to me and of the wider problems which those happenings had raised.

Instrumental music, oddly enough, left me rather cold. Mozart's C-Minor Piano Concerto was interrupted after the first movement, and a recording of some madrigals by Gesualdo took its place.

"These voices," I said appreciatively, "these voices—they're a kind of bridge back to the human world."

And a bridge they remained even while singing the most startlingly chromatic of the mad prince's compositions. Through the uneven phrases of the madrigals, the music pursued its course, never sticking to the same key for two bars together. In Gesualdo, that fantastic character out of a Webster melodrama, psychological disintegration had exaggerated, had pushed to the extreme limit, a tendency inherent in modal as opposed to fully tonal music. The resulting works sounded as though they might have been written by the later Schoenberg.

"And yet," I felt myself constrained to say, as I listened to these strange products of a Counter-Reformation psychosis working upon a late medieval art form, "and yet it does not matter that he's all in bits. The whole is disorganized. But each individual fragment is in order, is a representative of a Higher Order. The Highest Order prevails even in the disintegration. The totality is present even in the broken pieces. More clearly present, perhaps, than in a completely coherent work. At least you aren't lulled into a sense of false security by some merely human, merely fabricated order. You have to rely on your immediate perception of the ultimate order. So in a certain sense disintegration may have its advantages. But of course it's dangerous, horribly dangerous. Suppose you couldn't get back, out of the chaos . . ."

From Gesualdo's madrigals we jumped, across a gulf of three centuries, to Alban Berg and the *Lyric Suite*.

"This" I announced in advance, "is going to be hell."

But, as it turned out, I was wrong. Actually the music sounded rather funny. Dredged up from the personal subconscious, agony succeeded twelve-tone agony; but what struck me was only the essential incongruity between a psychological disintegration even completer than Gesualdo's and the prodigious resources, in talent and technique, employed in its expression.

"Isn't he sorry for himself?" I commented with a derisive lack of sympathy. And then, "*Katzenmusik*—learned *Katzenmusik*." And finally, after a few more minutes of the anguish, "Who cares what his feelings are? Why can't he pay attention to something else?"

As a criticism of what is undoubtedly a very remarkable work, it was unfair and inadequate—but not, I think, irrelevant. I cite it for what it is worth and because that is how, in a state of pure contemplation, I reacted to the *Lyric Suite*.

When it was over, the investigator suggested a walk in the garden. I was willing; and though my body seemed to have dissociated itself almost completely from my mind—or, to be more accurate,

though my awareness of the transfigured outer world was no longer accompanied by an awareness of my physical organism—I found myself able to get up, open the French window and walk out with only a minimum of hesitation. It was odd, of course, to feel that “I” was not the same as these arms and legs “out there,” as this wholly objective trunk and neck and even head. It was odd; but one soon got used to it. And anyhow the body seemed perfectly well able to look after itself. In reality, of course, it always does look after itself. All that the conscious ego can do is to formulate wishes, which are then carried out by forces which it controls very little and understands not at all. When it does anything more—when it tries too hard, for example, when it worries, when it becomes apprehensive about the future—it lowers the effectiveness of those forces and may even cause the devitalized body to fall ill. In my present state, awareness was not referred to as ego; it was, so to speak, on its own. This meant that the physiological intelligence controlling the body was also on its own. For the moment that interfering neurotic who, in waking hours, tries to run the show, was blessedly out of the way.

From the French window I walked out under a kind of pergola covered in part by a climbing rose tree, in part by laths, one inch wide with half an inch of space between them. The sun was shining and the shadows of the laths made a zebra-like pattern on the ground and across the seat and back of a garden chair, which was standing at this end of the pergola. That chair—shall I ever forget it? Where the shadows fell on the canvas upholstery, stripes of a deep but glowing indigo alternated with stripes of an incandescence so intensely bright that it was hard to believe that they could be made of anything but blue fire. For what seemed an immensely long time I gazed without knowing, even without wishing to know, what it was that confronted me. At any other time I would have seen a chair barred with alternate light and shade. Today the percept had swallowed up the concept. I was so completely absorbed in looking, so thunderstruck by what I actually saw, that I could not be aware of anything else. Garden furniture, laths, sunlight, shadow—these were no more than names and notions, mere verbalizations, for utilitarian or scientific purposes, after the event. The event was this succession of azure furnace doors separated by gulfs of unfathomable gentian. It was inexpressibly wonderful, wonderful to the point, almost, of being terrifying. And suddenly I had an inkling of what it must feel like to be mad. Schizophrenia has its heavens as well as its hells and purgatories. I remember what an old friend, dead these many years, told me about his mad wife. One day in the early stages of the disease, when she still had her lucid intervals he had gone to talk to her about their children. She listened for a time, then cut him short. How could he bear to waste his time on a couple of absent children, when all that really mattered, here and now, was the unspeakable beauty of the patterns he made, in this brown tweed jacket, every time he moved his arms? Alas, this Paradise of cleansed perception, of pure one-sided contemplation, was not to endure. The blissful intermissions became rarer, became briefer, until finally there were no more of them; there was only horror.

Most takers of mescaline experience only the heavenly part of schizophrenia. The drug brings hell and purgatory only to those who have had a recent case of jaundice, or who suffer from periodical depressions or a chronic anxiety. If, like the other drugs of remotely comparable power, mescaline were notoriously toxic, the taking of it would be enough, of itself, to cause anxiety. But the reasonably healthy person knows in advance that, so far as he is concerned, mescaline is completely innocuous, that its effects will pass off after eight or ten hours, leaving no hangover and consequently no craving for a renewal of the dose. Fortified by this knowledge, he embarks upon the experiment without fear—in other words, without any disposition to convert an unprecedentedly strange and other than human experience into something appalling, something actually diabolical.

Confronted by a chair which looked like the Last Judgment—or, to be more accurate, by a Last Judgment which, after a long time and with considerable difficulty, I recognized as a chair—I found myself all at once on the brink of panic. This, I suddenly felt, was going too far. Too far, even though the going was into intenser beauty, deeper significance. The fear, as I analyze it in retrospect, was of being overwhelmed, of disintegrating under a pressure of reality greater than a mind, accustomed to living most of the time in a cosy world of symbols, could possibly bear. The literature of religious

experience abounds in references to the pains and terrors overwhelming those who have come, too suddenly, face to face with some manifestation of the *Mysterium tremendum*. In theological language, this fear is due to the in-compatibility between man's egotism and the divine purity, between man's self-aggravated separateness and the infinity of God. Following Boehme and William Law, we may say that, by unregenerate souls, the divine Light at its full blaze can be apprehended only as a burning, purgatorial fire. An almost identical doctrine is to be found in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, where the departed soul is described as shrinking in agony from the Pure Light of the Void, and even from the lesser, tempered Lights, in order to rush headlong into the comforting darkness of selfhood as a reborn human being, or even as a beast, an unhappy ghost, a denizen of hell. Anything rather than the burning brightness of unmitigated Reality—anything!

The schizophrenic is a soul not merely unregenerate, but desperately sick into the bargain. His sickness consists in the inability to take refuge from inner and outer reality (as the sane person habitually does) in the homemade universe of common sense—the strictly human world of useful notions, shared symbols and socially acceptable conventions. The schizophrenic is like a man permanently under the influence of mescaline, and therefore unable to shut off the experience of a reality which he is not holy enough to live with, which he cannot explain away because it is the most stubborn of primary facts, and which, because it never permits him to look at the world with merely human eyes, scares him into interpreting its unrelenting strangeness, its burning intensity of significance, as the manifestations of human or even cosmic malevolence, calling for the most desperate countermeasures, from murderous violence at one end of the scale to catatonia, or psychological suicide, at the other. And once embarked upon the downward, the infernal road, one would never be able to stop. That, now, was only too obvious.

"If you started in the wrong way," I said in answer to the investigator's questions, "everything that happened would be a proof of the conspiracy against you. It would all be self-validating. You couldn't draw a breath without knowing it was part of the plot."

"So you think you know where madness lies?"

My answer was a convinced and heartfelt, "Yes."

"And you couldn't control it?"

"No I couldn't control it. If one began with fear and hate as the major premise, one would have to go on to the conclusion."

"Would you be able," my wife asked, "to fix your attention on what *The Tibetan Book of The Dead* calls the Clear Light?"

I was doubtful.

"Would it keep the evil away, if you could hold it? Or would you not be able to hold it?"

I considered the question for some time. "Perhaps," I answered at last, "perhaps I could—but only if there were somebody there to tell me about the Clear Light. One couldn't do it by oneself. That's the point, I suppose, of the Tibetan ritual—someone sitting there all the time and telling you what's what."

After listening to the record of this part of the experiment, I took down my copy of Evans-Wentz's edition of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and opened at random. "O nobly born, let not thy mind be distracted." That was the problem—to remain undistracted. Undistracted by the memory of past sins, by imagined pleasure, by the bitter aftertaste of old wrongs and humiliations, by all the fears and hates and cravings that ordinarily eclipse the Light. What those Buddhist monks did for the dying and the dead, might not the modern psychiatrist do for the insane? Let there be a voice to assure them, by day and even while they are asleep, that in spite of all the terror, all the bewilderment and confusion, the ultimate Reality remains unshakably itself and is of the same substance as the inner light of even the most cruelly tormented mind. By means of such devices as recorders, clock-controlled switches, public address systems and pillow speakers it should be very easy to keep the inmates of even an understaffed institution constantly reminded of this primordial fact. Perhaps a few of the lost souls might in this



way be helped to win some measure of control over the universe—at once beautiful and appalling, but always other than human, always totally incomprehensible—in which they find themselves condemned to live.

None too soon, I was steered away from the disquieting splendors of my garden chair. Drooping in green parabolas from the hedge, the ivy fronds shone with a kind of glassy, jade-like radiance. A moment later a clump of Red Hot Pokers, in full bloom, had exploded into my field of vision. So passionately alive that they seemed to be standing on the very brink of utterance, the flowers strained upwards into the blue. Like the chair under the laths, they protected too much. I looked down at the leaves and discovered a cavernous intricacy of the most delicate green lights and shadows, pulsing with undecipherable mystery.

*Roses:
The flowers are easy to paint,
The leaves difficult.*

Shiki's haiku (which I quote in R. H. Blyth's translation) expresses, by indirection, exactly what I then felt—the excessive, the too obvious glory of the flowers, as contrasted with the subtler miracle of their foliage.

We walked out into the street. A large pale blue automobile was standing at the curb. At the sight of it, I was suddenly overcome by enormous merriment. What complacency, what an absurd self-satisfaction beamed from those bulging surfaces of glossiest enamel! Man had created the thing in his own image—or rather in the image of his favorite character in fiction. I laughed till the tears ran down my cheeks.

We re-entered the house. A meal had been prepared. Somebody, who was not yet identical with myself, fell to with ravenous appetite. From a considerable distance and without much interest, I looked on.

When the meal had been eaten, we got into the car and went for a drive. The effects of the mescaline were already on the decline: but the flowers in the gardens still trembled on the brink of being supernatural, the pepper trees and carobs along the side streets still manifestly belonged to some sacred grove. Eden alternated with Dodona. Yggdrasil with the mystic Rose. And then, abruptly, we were at an intersection, waiting to cross Sunset Boulevard. Before us the cars were rolling by in a steady stream—thousands of them, all bright and shiny like an advertiser's dream and each more ludicrous than the last. Once again I was convulsed with laughter.

The Red Sea of traffic parted at last, and we crossed into another oasis of trees and lawns and roses. In a few minutes we had climbed to a vantage point in the hills, and there was the city spread out beneath us. Rather disappointingly, it looked very like the city I had seen on other occasions. So far as I was concerned, transfiguration was proportional to distance. The nearer, the more divinely other. This vast, dim panorama was hardly different from itself.

We drove on, and so long as we remained in the hills, with view succeeding distant view, significance was at its everyday level, well below transfiguration point. The magic began to work again only when we turned down into a new suburb and were gliding between two rows of houses. Here, in spite of the peculiar hideousness of the architecture, there were renewals of transcendental otherness, hints of the morning's heaven. Brick chimneys and green composition roofs glowed in the sunshine, like fragments of the New Jerusalem. And all at once I saw what Guardi had seen and (with what incomparable skill) had so often rendered in his paintings—a stucco wall with a shadow slanting across it, blank but unforgettably beautiful, empty but charged with all the meaning and the mystery of existence. The revelation dawned and was gone again within a fraction of a second. The car had moved on; time was uncovering another manifestation of the eternal Suchness. "Within sameness there is difference. But that difference should be different from sameness is in no wise the intention of all the

Buddhas. Their intention is both totality and differentiation.” This bank of red and white geraniums, for example—it was entirely different from that stucco wall a hundred yards up the road. But the “is-ness” of both was the same, the eternal quality of their transience was the same.

An hour later, with ten more miles and the visit to the World’s Biggest Drug Store safely behind us, we were back at home, and I had returned to that reassuring but profoundly unsatisfactory state known as “being in one’s right mind.”

That humanity at large will ever be able to dispense with Artificial Paradises seems very unlikely. Most men and women lead lives at the worst so painful, at the best so monotonous, poor and limited that the urge to escape, the longing to transcend themselves if only for a few moments, is and has always been one of the principal appetites of the soul. Art and religion, carnivals and saturnalia, dancing and listening to oratory—all these have served, in H. G. Wells’s phrase, as Doors in the Wall. And for private, far everyday use there have always been chemical intoxicants. All the vegetable sedatives and narcotics, all the euphorics that grow on trees, the hallucinogens that ripen in berries or can be squeezed from roots—all, without exception, have been known and systematically used by human beings from time immemorial. And to these natural modifiers of consciousness modern science has added its quota of synthetics—chloral, for example, and benzedrine, the bromides and the barbiturates.

Most of these modifiers of consciousness cannot now be taken except under doctor’s orders, or else illegally and at considerable risk. For unrestricted use the West has permitted only alcohol and tobacco. All the other chemical Doors in the Wall are labeled Dope, and their unauthorized takers are Fiends.

We now spend a good deal more on drink and smoke than we spend on education. This, of course, is not surprising. The urge to escape from selfhood and the environment is in almost everyone almost all the time. The urge to do something for the young is strong only in parents, and in them only for the few years during which their children go to school. Equally unsurprising is the current attitude towards drink and smoke. In spite of the growing army of hopeless alcoholics, in spite of the hundreds of thousands of persons annually maimed or killed by drunken drivers, popular comedians still crack jokes about alcohol and its addicts. And in spite of the evidence linking cigarettes with lung cancer, practically everybody regards tobacco smoking as being hardly less normal and natural than eating. From the point of view of the rationalist utilitarian this may seem odd. For the historian, it is exactly what you would expect. A firm conviction of the material reality of Hell never prevented medieval Christians from doing what their ambition, lust or covetousness suggested. Lung cancer, traffic accidents and the millions of miserable and misery-creating alcoholics are facts even more certain than was, in Dante’s day, the fact of the Inferno. But all such facts are remote and unsubstantial compared with the near, felt fact of a craving, here and now, for release or sedation, for a drink or a smoke.

Ours is the age, among other things, of the automobile and of rocketing population. Alcohol is incompatible with safety on the roads, and its production, like that of tobacco, condemns to virtual sterility many millions of acres of the most fertile soil. The problems raised by alcohol and tobacco cannot, it goes without saying, be solved by prohibition. The universal and ever-present urge to self-transcendence is not to be abolished by slamming the currently popular Doors in the Wall. The only reasonable policy is to open other, better doors in the hope of inducing men and women to exchange their old bad habits for new and less harmful ones. Some of these other, better doors will be social and technological in nature, others religious or psychological, others dietetic, educational, athletic. But the need for frequent chemical vacations from intolerable selfhood and repulsive surroundings will undoubtedly remain. What is needed is a new drug which will relieve and console our suffering species without doing more harm in the long run than it does good in the short. Such a drug must be potent in minute doses and synthesizable. If it does not possess these qualities, its production, like that of wine, beer, spirits and tobacco will interfere with the raising of indispensable food and fibers. It must be less toxic than opium or cocaine, less likely to produce undesirable social consequences than alcohol or

the barbiturates, less inimical to heart and lungs than the tars and nicotine of cigarettes. And, on the positive side, it should produce changes in consciousness more interesting, more intrinsically valuable than mere sedation or dreaminess, delusions of omnipotence or release from inhibition.

To most people, mescaline is almost completely innocuous. Unlike alcohol, it does not drive the taker into the kind of uninhibited action which results in brawls, crimes of violence and traffic accidents. A man under the influence of mescaline quietly minds his own business. Moreover, the business he minds is an experience of the most enlightening kind, which does not have to be paid for (and this is surely important) by a compensatory hangover. Of the long-range consequences of regular mescaline taking we know very little. The Indians who consume peyote buttons do not seem to be physically or morally degraded by the habit. However, the available evidence is still scarce and sketchy.² Although obviously superior to cocaine, opium, alcohol and tobacco, mescaline is not yet the ideal drug. Along with the happily transfigured majority of mescaline takers there is a minority that finds in the drug only hell or purgatory. Moreover, for a drug that is to be used, like alcohol, for general consumption, its effects last for an inconveniently long time. But chemistry and physiology are capable nowadays of practically anything. If the psychologists and sociologists will define the ideal, the neurologists and pharmacologists can be relied upon to discover the means whereby that ideal can be realized or at least (for perhaps this kind of ideal can never, in the very nature of things, be fully realized) more nearly approached than in the wine-bibbing past, the whisky-drinking, marijuana-smoking and barbiturate-swallowing present.

The urge to transcend self-conscious selfhood is, as I have said, a principal appetite of the soul. When, for whatever reason, men and women fail to transcend themselves by means of worship, good works and spiritual exercises, they are apt to resort to religion's chemical surrogates—alcohol and “goof pills” in the modern West, alcohol and opium in the East, hashish in the Mohammedan world, alcohol and marijuana in Central America, alcohol and coca in the Andes, alcohol and the barbiturates in the more up-to-date regions of South America. In *Poisons Sacrés, Ivresses Divines* Philippe de Felice has written at length and with a wealth of documentation on the immemorial connection between religion and the taking of drugs. Here, in summary or in direct quotation, are his conclusions. The employment for religious purposes of toxic substances is “extraordinarily widespread The practices studied in this volume can be observed in every region of the earth, among primitives no less than among those who have reached a high pitch of civilization. We are therefore dealing not with exceptional facts, which might justifiably be overlooked, but with a general and, in the widest sense of the word, a human phenomenon, the kind of phenomenon which cannot be disregarded by anyone who is trying to discover what religion is, and what are the deep needs which it must satisfy.”

Ideally, everyone should be able to find self-transcendence in some form of pure or applied religion. In practice it seems very unlikely that this hoped for consummation will ever be realized. There are, and doubtless there always will be, good churchmen and good churchwomen for whom, unfortunately, piety is not enough. The late G. K. Chesterton, who wrote at least as lyrically of drink as of devotion, may serve as their eloquent spokesman.

The modern churches, with some exceptions among the Protestant denominations, tolerate alcohol; but even the most tolerant have made no attempt to convert the drug to Christianity, or to sacramentalize its use. The pious drinker is forced to take his religion in one compartment, his religion-surrogate in another. And perhaps this is inevitable. Drinking cannot be sacramentalized except in religions which set no store on decorum. The worship of Dionysos or the Celtic god of beer was a loud and disorderly affair. The rites of Christianity are incompatible with even religious drunkenness. This does no harm to the distillers, but is very bad for Christianity. Countless persons desire self-transcendence and would be glad to find it in church. But, alas, “the hungry sheep look up and are not fed.” They take part in rites, they listen to sermons, they repeat prayers; but their thirst remains unassuaged. Disappointed, they turn to the bottle. For a time at least and in a kind of way, it works. Church may still be attended; but it is no more than the Musical Bank of Butler's *Erewhon*. God may

still be acknowledged; but He is God only on the verbal level, only in a strictly Pickwickian sense. The effective object of worship is the bottle and the sole religious experience is that state of uninhibited and belligerent euphoria which follows the ingestion of the third cocktail.

We see, then, that Christianity and alcohol do not and cannot mix. Christianity and mescaline seem to be much more compatible. This has been demonstrated by many tribes of Indians, from Texas to as far north as Wisconsin. Among these tribes are to be found groups affiliated with the Native American Church, a sect whose principal rite is a kind of Early Christian agape, or love feast, where slices of peyote take the place of the sacramental bread and wine. These Native Americans regard the cactus as God's special gift to the Indians, and equate its effects with the workings of the divine Spirit.

Professor J. S. Slotkin, one of the very few white men ever to have participated in the rites of a Peyotist congregation, says of his fellow worshipers that they are "certainly not stupefied or drunk They never get out of rhythm or fumble their words, as a drunken or stupefied man would do They are all quiet, courteous and considerate of one another. I have never been in any white man's house of worship where there is either so much religious feeling or decorum." And what, we may ask, are these devout and well-behaved Peyotists experiencing? Not the mild sense of virtue which sustains the average Sunday churchgoer through ninety minutes of boredom. Not even those high feelings, inspired by thoughts of the Creator and the Redeemer, the Judge and the Comforter, which animate the pious. For these Native Americans, religious experience is something more direct and illuminating, more spontaneous, less the homemade product of the superficial, self-conscious mind. Sometimes (according to the reports collected by Dr. Slotkin) they see visions, which may be of Christ Himself. Sometimes they hear the voice of the Great Spirit. Sometimes they become aware of the presence of God and of those personal shortcomings which must be corrected if they are to do His will. The practical consequences of these chemical openings of doors into the Other World seem to be wholly good. Dr. Slotkin reports that habitual Peyotists are on the whole more industrious, more temperate (many of them abstain altogether from alcohol), more peaceable than non-Peyotists. A tree with such satisfactory fruits cannot be condemned out of hand as evil.

In sacramentalizing the use of peyote, the Indians of the Native American Church have done something which is at once psychologically sound and historically respectable. In the early centuries of Christianity many pagan rites and festivals were baptized, so to say, and made to serve the purposes of the Church. These jollifications were not particularly edifying; but they assuaged a certain psychological hunger and, instead of trying to suppress them, the earlier missionaries had the sense to accept them for what they were, soul-satisfying expressions of fundamental urges, and to incorporate them into the fabric of the new religion. What the Native Americans have done is essentially similar. They have taken a pagan custom (a custom, incidentally, far more elevating and enlightening than most of the rather brutish carousals and mummeries adopted from European paganism) and given it a Christian significance.

Though but recently introduced into the northern United States, peyote-eating and the religion based upon it have become important symbols of the red man's right to spiritual independence. Some Indians have reacted to white supremacy by becoming Americanized, others by retreating into traditional Indianism. But some have tried to make the best of both worlds, indeed of all the worlds—the best of Indianism, the best of Christianity, and the best of those Other Worlds of transcendental experience, where the soul knows itself as unconditioned and of like nature with the divine. Hence the Native American Church. In it two great appetites of the soul—the urge to independence and self-determination and the urge to self-transcendence—were fused with, and interpreted in the light of, a third—the urge to worship, to justify the ways of God to man, to explain the universe by means of a coherent theology.

*Lo, the poor Indian, whose untutored mind
Clothes him in front, but leaves him bare behind.*

But actually it is we, the rich and highly educated whites, who have left ourselves bare behind. We cover our anterior nakedness with some philosophy—Christian, Marxian, Freudo-Physicalist—but abaft we remain uncovered, at the mercy of all the winds of circumstance. The poor Indian, on the other hand, has had the wit to protect his rear by supplementing the fig leaf of a theology with the breechclout of transcendental experience.

I am not so foolish as to equate what happens under the influence of mescaline or of any other drug, prepared or in the future preparable, with the realization of the end and ultimate purpose of human life: Enlightenment, the Beatific Vision. All I am suggesting is that the mescaline experience is what Catholic theologians call “a gratuitous grace,” not necessary to salvation but potentially helpful and to be accepted thankfully, if made available. To be shaken out of the ruts of ordinary perception, to be shown for a few timeless hours the outer and the inner world, not as they appear to an animal obsessed with survival or to a human being obsessed with words and notions, but as they are apprehended, directly and unconditionally, by Mind at Large—this is an experience of inestimable value to everyone and especially to the intellectual. For the intellectual is by definition the man for whom, in Goethe’s phrase, “the word is essentially fruitful.” He is the man who feels that “what we perceive by the eye is foreign to us as such and need not impress us deeply.” And yet, though himself an intellectual and one of the supreme masters of language, Goethe did not always agree with his own evaluation of the word. “We talk,” he wrote in middle life, “far too much. We should talk less and draw more. I personally should like to renounce speech altogether and, like organic Nature, communicate everything I have to say in sketches. That fig tree, this little snake, the cocoon on my window sill quietly awaiting its future—all these are momentous signatures. A person able to decipher their meaning properly would soon be able to dispense with the written or the spoken word altogether. The more I think of it, there is something futile, mediocre, even (I am tempted to say) foppish about speech. By contrast, how the gravity of Nature and her silence startle you, when you stand face to face with her, undistracted, before a barren ridge or in the desolation of the ancient hills.” We can never dispense with language and the other symbol systems; for it is by means of them, and only by their means, that we have raised ourselves above the brutes, to the level of human beings. But we can easily become the victims as well as the beneficiaries of these systems. We must learn how to handle words effectively; but at the same time we must preserve and, if necessary, intensify our ability to look at the world directly and not through that half opaque medium of concepts, which distorts every given fact into the all too familiar likeness of some generic label or explanatory abstraction.

Literary or scientific, liberal or specialist, all our education is predominantly verbal and therefore fails to accomplish what it is supposed to do. Instead of transforming children into fully developed adults, it turns out students of the natural sciences who are completely unaware of Nature as the primary fact of experience, it inflicts upon the world students of the humanities who know nothing of humanity, their own or anyone else’s.

Gestalt psychologists, such as Samuel Renshaw, have devised methods for widening the range and increasing the acuity of human perceptions. But do our educators apply them? The answer is, No.

Teachers in every field of psyche-physical skill, from seeing to tennis, from tightrope walking to prayer, have discovered, by trial and error, the conditions of optimum functioning within their special fields. But have any of the great Foundations financed a project for coordinating these empirical findings into a general theory and practice of heightened creativeness? Again, so far as I am aware, the answer is, No.

All sorts of cultists and queer fish teach all kinds of techniques for achieving health, contentment, peace of mind; and for many of their hearers many of these techniques are demonstrably effective. But do we see respectable psychologists, philosophers and clergymen boldly descending into those odd and sometimes malodorous wells, at the bottom of which poor Truth is so often condemned to sit? Yet once more the answer is, No.

And now look at the history of mescaline research. Seventy years ago men of first-rate ability described the transcendental experiences which come to those who, in good health, under proper conditions and in the right spirit, take the drug. How many philosophers, how many theologians, how many professional educators have had the curiosity to open this Door in the Wall? The answer, for all practical purposes, is, None.

In a world where education is predominantly verbal, highly educated people find it all but impossible to pay serious attention to anything but words and notions. There is always money for, there are always doctorates in, the learned foolery of research into what, for scholars, is the all-important problem: Who influenced whom to say what when? Even in this age of technology the verbal humanities are honored. The non-verbal humanities, the arts of being directly aware of the given facts of our existence, are almost completely ignored. A catalogue, a bibliography, a definitive edition of a third-rate versifier's *ipsisima verba*, a stupendous index to end all indexes—any genuinely Alexandrian project is sure of approval and financial support: But when it comes to finding out how you and I, our children and grand-children, may become more perceptive, more intensely aware of inward and outward reality, more open to the Spirit, less apt, by psychological malpractices, to make ourselves physically ill, and more capable of controlling our own autonomic nervous system—when it comes to any form of non-verbal education more fundamental (and more likely to be of some practical use) than Swedish drill, no really respectable person in any really respectable university or church will do anything about it. Verbalists are suspicious of the non-verbal; rationalists fear the given, non-rational fact; intellectuals feel that “what we perceive by the eye (or in any other way) is foreign to us as such and need not impress us deeply.” Besides, this matter of education in the non-verbal humanities will not fit into any of the established pigeonholes. It is not religion, not neurology, not gymnastics, not morality or civics, not even experimental psychology. This being so the subject is, for academic and ecclesiastical purposes, non-existent and may safely be ignored altogether or left, with a patronizing smile, to those whom the Pharisees of verbal orthodoxy call cranks, quacks, charlatans and unqualified amateurs.

“I have always found,” Blake wrote rather bitterly, “that Angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise. This they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning.”

Systematic reasoning is something we could not, as a species or as individuals, possibly do without. But neither, if we are to remain sane, can we possibly do without direct perception, the more unsystematic the better, of the inner and outer worlds into which we have been born. This given reality is an infinite which passes all understanding and yet admits of being directly and in some sort totally apprehended. It is a transcendence belonging to another order than the human, and yet it may be present to us as a felt immanence, an experienced participation. To be enlightened is to be aware, always, of total reality in its immanent otherness—to be aware of it and yet to remain in a condition to survive as an animal, to think and feel as a human being, to resort whenever expedient to systematic reasoning. Our goal is to discover that we have always been where we ought to be. Unhappily we make the task exceedingly difficult for ourselves. Meanwhile, however, there are gratuitous graces in the form of partial and fleeting realizations. Under a more realistic, a less exclusively verbal system of education than ours, every Angel (in Blake's sense of that word) would be permitted as a sabbatical treat, would be urged and even, if necessary, compelled to take an occasional trip through some chemical Door in the Wall into the world of transcendental experience. If it terrified him, it would be unfortunate but probably salutary. If it brought him a brief but timeless illumination, so much the better. In either case the Angel might lose a little of the confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning and the consciousness of having read all the books.

Near the end of his life Aquinas experienced Infused Contemplation. Thereafter he refused to go back to work on his unfinished book. Compared with this, everything he had read and argued about and written—Aristotle and the Sentences, the Questions, the Propositions, the majestic Summas—was no better than chaff or straw. For most intellectuals such a sit-down strike would be inadvisable, even

morally wrong. But the Angelic Doctor had done more systematic reasoning than any twelve ordinary Angels, and was already ripe for death. He had earned the right, in those last months of his mortality, to turn away from merely symbolic straw and chaff to the bread of actual and substantial Fact. For Angels of a lower order and with better prospects of longevity, there must be a return to the straw. But the man who comes back through the Door in the Wall will never be quite the same as the man who went out. He will be wiser but less cocksure, happier but less self-satisfied, humbler in acknowledging his ignorance yet better equipped to understand the relationship of words to things, of systematic reasoning to the unfathomable Mystery which it tries, forever vainly, to comprehend.

* * *

Footnotes

1. See the following papers:

- “Schizophrenia. A New Approach.” By Humphry Osmond and John Smythies. *Journal of Mental Science*. Vol. XCVIII. April, 1952.
- “On Being Mad.” By Humphry Osmond. *Saskatchewan Psychiatric Services Journal*. Vol. I. No. 2. September. 1952.
- “The Mescaline Phenomena.” By John Smythies. *The British Journal of the Philosophy of Science*. Vol. III. February, 1953.
- “Schizophrenia: A New Approach.” By Abram Hoffer, Humphry Osmond and John Smythies. *Journal of Mental Science*. Vol. C. No. 418. January, 1954.

Numerous other papers on the biochemistry, pharmacology, psychology and neurophysiology of schizophrenia and the mescaline phenomena are in preparation.

2. In his monograph, *Menominee Peyotism*, published (December 1952) in the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Professor J. S. Slotkin has written that “the habitual use of Peyote does not seem to produce any increased tolerance or dependence. I know many people who have been Peyotists for forty to fifty years. The amount of Peyote they use depends upon the solemnity of the occasion; in general they do not take any more Peyote now than they did years ago. Also, there is sometimes an interval of a month or more between rites, and they go without Peyote during this period without feeling any craving for it. Personally, even after a series of rites occurring on four successive weekends. I neither increased the amount of Peyote consumed nor felt any continued need for it.” It is evidently with good reason that “Peyote has never been legally declared a narcotic, or its use prohibited by the federal government.” However, “during the long history of Indian-white contact, white officials have usually tried to suppress the use of Peyote, because it has been conceived to violate their own mores. But these attempts have always failed.” In a footnote Dr. Slotkin adds that “it is amazing to hear the fantastic stories about the effects of Peyote and the nature of the ritual, which are told by the white and Catholic Indian officials in the Menominee Reservation. None of them have had the slightest first-hand experience with the plant or with the religion, yet some fancy themselves to be authorities and write official reports on the subject.”

* * * * *

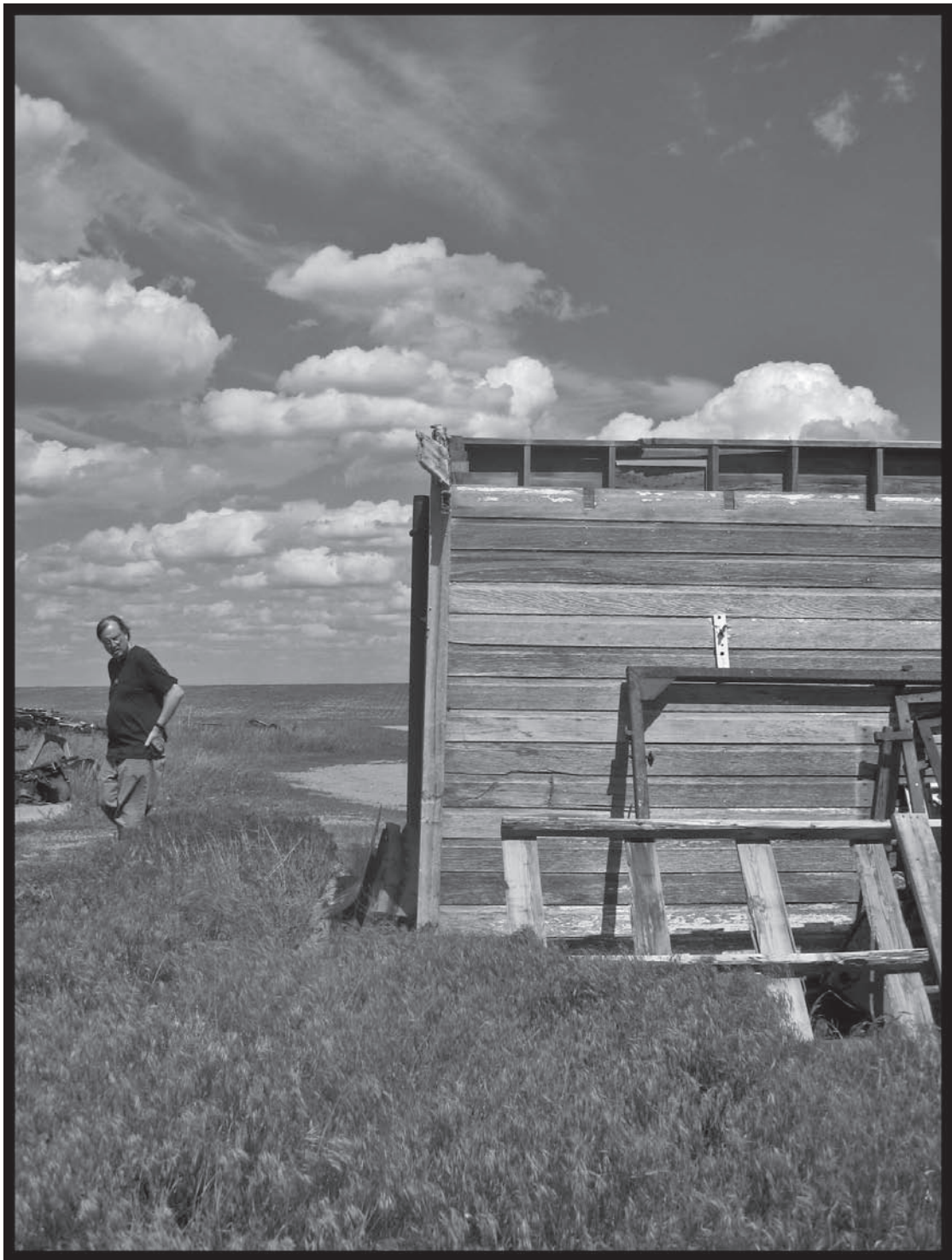


Joe Coleman


No Lullabies

These dreary hours between two and four a.m.
 are the realm of King Despair
 This is when elastic time makes clocks appear unreliable
 —when every “tick-tock” is amplified
 This is when blistered angels sort the harvest of night prayers
 and scatter them unanswered to the stars
 —when psychic vandals spray graffiti on walls of delusion
 —when sleeplessness murmurs names morning will deny
 This is when only streetlights see dark shapes that cast the
 shadow populace haunting these dreary hours
 —when traffic signals blink their electric-candy warnings
 over poisonous avenues.
 This is when alley paths are splashed anew with the piss,
 vomit, and tears of ghosts
 —when everything sounds like the end of an alto sax solo
 fading away eternally in the distance.
 It is the time of lonely echoes from nowhere.
 It is the time most colors surrender to greys and blacks.
 This is when everything feels like the last passenger
 on the last train, reaching the last stop,
 in no hurry to stand up, climb the stairs,
 then stumble home
 since the next day at home
 is every bit as bleak
 as these dreary hours between two and four a.m.
 when we should be in bed
 having nightmares.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.


Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Eleven

*"I must create a system,
or be enslaved by another man's"*
—William Blake, "Jerusalem."

lvii.

Deep inside Travelers Tale, far into the mountains, long years of it, feels like, is this how to begin to thread & glue the scattered things?

Sit back. It's on TV, that story in the mountains, it's right there on that black & white TV, whose grainy picture I have to adjust with the Antennar 2000 box on top.

But there are no Travellers up on that mountain, not right now, not a one. Why did I think that? Have I lost track? How did that happen?

Look around my room. There's a candle on the big box next to my bed. Some matches from a place called Red Dog Diner, light it up.

My bed is rickety, at best, thin blanket, thin pillow. The TV over there I see is on a small purple stool, looks like an old chair with its back gone.

On the wall to my right there is a map. It's. Um. Islands? I count. OK, 6 of them. Of course. They are sort of, um, clustered together. *Oh*. OK. Something in that.

On the wall my bed rests against there is what looks like a page torn from a newspaper or a cheap magazine. Depicted a big bellied man wearing a strange getup, shapeless cloth hat. A sweater with zigzags across from it, stretched over his great belly. His pants a clashing design, pulled up too high over his waist. Long socks pulled up to his knees. Golf shoes? Yes, & a golf

club in his hand. Some kind of iron.

And, look, there's an old golf bag in the corner there. Hmm. Do I golf?

Oh. A White Bunny, sitting down there, near the golfbag, on a little stool, smaller & shorter than the TV's.

Looking at me. Glowing white fur, fierce beautiful eyes upon me.

Oh. MeZmer from the Travellers Tale. And elsewhere.

"You're not up on the mountains," I say to you, foolishly, but honestly.
You sniff once. Say nothing.

I look at myself. At the ragged clothes I wear. That's OK. That's familiar at least.

Sit up. Legs on the floor. My old old boots waiting there.
OK, that too. Pull them on.
Stand, sway, steady.

MeZmer still watching me.
Many times smaller than me.
But not really at all.

Still. "Bring me to the Travellers."
No reply. Not even a sniff.
"Please. I'm not sure why, but this is how it gets to where it's going."

Now a sniff. Looking at my golf bag.
Oh. Well, OK. I lift up the bag, it's got maybe 3 clubs in it, but OK.

I pull open the door for her & she hops purposefully through it & down the hallway.

I make to follow but the hallway is warped to my view & I find to steady, only way to steady, is to sort of dance my way along. This works better.

So I groove & dance my way along behind my hopping Bunny friend, & push the exit door open for her.

We come out to what appears to be a beautiful garden, maybe the prettiest one I've ever been in.

OK, I've done this before. It's like I'm enacting one of my many smaller stories. In it, I am a poor, ragged golfer who lives in the Pensionne in the Village & once a week goes with his golf bag & his White Bunny friend up those distant grey hills to the White Woods beyond, &

enacts a kind of golfing ritual which it's believed keeps this Island from experiencing something dreadful.

What dreadful thing? Why does this ritual stave it off? How did it begin?

I don't know, or don't remember.

And why start here in beginning to bring scattered things together? How will this help unite the Six Islands, like shown in my room's wall picture?

I don't know. But I follow MeZmer hopping along up the brown hills &, like practiced, begin to *hmmm* as we enter the White Woods & thus follow this sung pathway to where a small golf ball rests on a tee. And looking to my right, I expect to see the cut swathe that leads to a swamp, which is where I drive that golf ball every week. Oddly, I recall now, using MeZmer as my golfing stick.

But. No swathe. *None*. Just White Woods, like in every other direction.

I look at MeZmer whose sniffings are many & quick, bespeaking her spookedness.

Um. *Hmm*. Um?

OK. That's why. That's why this, what the message.

I kneel down to MeZmer & hold out my arms. She sniffs, demurs, but will hop near me. Shoulder my golf bag, & we begin to walk & hop deeper into these somehow stirred up strange White Woods.

We walk deeper into the White Woods but I mean not to say this like tis an outer area & a center. The White Woods has neither.

I come to another little open area, & another golf ball on a tee but, again, no clear swathe to strike the ball through.

Hm. What then?

I look down at MeZmer, yet she is high above me in knowing, a sniff, a *hmmm*, a long hop, ears flying back—

I pull out my black pen, for comfort, but notice it has no cap on either side. *What? How?*
I don't know.

We walk & hop on.

I listen, try to listen. Distantly, barely:

*And it's just a box of rain . . .
 or a ribbon for your hair . . .
 such a long long time to be gone . . .
 and a short time to be there . . .*

A black pen with no cap.
 A golf ball with no swathe.
 A White Bunny sniffing & sniffing.
 No deeper, no center, no shallow.

Make Art Now.

I sit down on the cool floor of the White Woods, leaves & needles & other things on its ground—

H m m m m m m m m m m

I feel it deep in me
 deeper than my bones
 look at my pen, no caps

MeZmer hops in my lap & dozes comfortably. A compliment, her trust—

Now what, the *hmmmm* deeper than my bones, White Bunny napping in my lap. Weird pen.

OK then. I close my eyes.
 Trying to let myself uncouple a bit, try to stop moving.

Really. Just. Stop.

Er, OK. O . . . K. I think.

What are these White Woods?
 Are they simply trees?
 Are they all white?
 Do they more glow than anything else? Yes. I like this.

They glow at night especially & maybe the glow is like the *hmmmm*

I want to ask MeZmer, tho I doubt she'll tell me, but she's napping still.

Look at my pen. Hey! A cap! Never had I been so thrilled to see one.

Course I'm also back there, the one looking down at this page, & writing just fine. Still, this is my pen & it's working again.

MeZmer wakes, hops off my lap, couple of sniffs & she sets off hopping fast—

At first I make to follow but then realize she's not waiting & way too fast me to follow—

OK—it's OK—she's my tender so if she leaves me be, it means she's not currently concerned my state—

So. White Woods. Glows at night. What now?

I hear a noise & along comes a friendly sight. Tis the Boat Wagon driven by those bloo-eyed Kittees & their yellow Friend Fish.

They pull up to me & I figure a ride is being offered. They don't speak the English much, but I can figure an invitation when it's offered.

So I get in the back seat & they wait for me to buckle up my seat belt (Safety First!), & then they put their white paws on their shared steering wheel & start to peddle on—

It is comfortable in the back of the Boat Wagon, a long bench with many blankets & pillows—so pleasant a ride I begin to doze, glad I'm here, right here, these glowing trees, these White Woods . . .

Wake, Kittees are staring at me in their strange but friendly way, & I see we're pulled up before a very strange too & charming house.

Oh. hm. Tis?

Yes. The Thought Fleas Domocile.

I unbuckle & get out of the Boat Wagon & notice the Kittees & Friend Fish remain in their seats, so I give them a friendly wave & walk up to the front door, not knowing what to expect.

Or do I? Wait, get this moment on straighter. I *do* know the Thought Fleas, know them well. What different here then?

Hm. OK, I've never done this in this book before. OK. Hm. Does that make a difference?

It does yes & no. Does anything not belong in this book that I can write of? Before I knock at that door, let me stop here & ask this & try to answer it.

Could go in several directions here:

- 1) I remember years of walking around my old college, long years ago, & then recently returning & walking there again, as a stranger, a rememberer, & feeling happy/sad over this.



- 2) *Cars 3* uses the kind of strategy that *Finding Dory* does by telling a story that encompasses the first movie, deepening & enlarging its myth, some prequel elements, some continuation.
- 3) Chemical Brothers' *Surrender* double-LP on my old but finely working stereo, broadcast around my house by very modern Sonos speakers, & I remember high blasting this music in a Seattle friend's house years ago, when it was pretty new music & it was exciting to know it & here are it & I again now, blasting & high.
- 4) I wonder if Trump will go down because he & the Russians stole the 2016 US presidential election, or if he will survive as cockroaches do, get re-elected because the Democrats will try & fail to triangulate a winning candidate by focus groups & marketing strategies.
- 5) My beloved loves when New England gets green & jungly in the spring & summer in part because she grew up in a place not very either.
- 6) We have an old Dell laptop named Essie we've set up to broadcast a kind of photo exhibition on her desktop, a vase of artificial flowers next to her, a shiny mask hanging off a corner of her open lid.

Hmm. Yah. OK. They belong. That's good. Now what?

I knock. K-nock! K-nock!

The door opens. There is a lovely looking Thought Flea, large eyes, possibly a tail, furred face & body, friendly smile, wearing clothes like not sure what for. Me too.

Tis Flossie Flea. She is one of the more well-known Fleas. She has a Rutabega Garden, likes to keep the White Woods neat, especially her portion of it. Has a clipboard to keep track.

"Hello, CC," she says, smiling & coming out. "I'm glad you've come finally. We should go now."

"Go?" asketh me.

She takes my hand & hurries us along back to the Boat Wagon. I guess why the Kittees & Friend Fish waited?

We get in the back set & buckle in. "Safety First!" she says, laughing. Nods to the Kittees & we peddle away from the Flea Domocile.

"Where are we going?"

She laughs. Her dress is a sort of pale blue with pretty rutabega blossoms on it. Are there such a thing? Well, I guess so, at least in these White Woods.

I think we doze awhile because it is a long way there, wherever this is. But are pulled up in front when we wake, Kittees & Friend Fish napping peaceably in the front seat.

We get out & this time the Kittees peddle on & we wave goodbye.

Walk up to the faintly glowing hut. Oh. Of course. This is, um, my hut in these White Woods. Strange but familiar.

Walk up to the door, which has a small portrait of a smiling Imp on it. Flossie nudges me & taps my shirt. I pull out my Burning Man 2003 pendant & touch it to the portrait, there is a soft cackle & a click. Door opens right up. We walk right in.

It is a one-room hut, filled with familiar items. Among them, two armchairs, & we each sit in one.

Look around in a very familiar way. My armchair is an old ragged green one, probably based on the memory of one I had in about 1985 for a few months in the first apartment I lived in. Yah.

Next to the armchair is a filing cabinet. On the far wall, pictures of Creatures & Thought Fleas. A little bookcase with books on Thought Fleas, Ghosts, Monsters, Pluckers, Explainers, Ladies Toe, Imps, Banditos, plus one called *I Ams the Masta' Splasha'!* by Madame Guru Klickk! & *The Great Big Book of Bellla!*—

The front door, shuttered window next to it. Our armchairs. To my right a painting of a fireplace on the wall that really works. Next to my chair an old chest I know contains blankets & pillows & such. & above me a door in the ceiling with a fishing wire hanging from it, a button tied to the very end. Up there a very strange Attic.

I smile at Flossie. Waiting.

She smiles back, waiting.

“Um?”

“I’m ready to be interviewed.”

“Um?”

She smiles again like I’m not seeming too bright right now.

“You wanted to know about we Thought Fleas & how we are the Guardians of the White Woods?”

O. Yah. I’d had that thought earlier in the week, thinking about what I’d write in *Labyrinthine* today. Seemed a good idea to chase.

She waits.

“So you are?”

She nods.

“Always?”

She looks at me, questioning. I have to recall time is not really something here.

“How do you do it?”

“It?”

“Um, guard? You’re so small.”

Another look & I recall they are small back where I come from but not here.

Smiles again. Encouraging.
I try again.

“Are there enemies?”
A look.
“Threats?”
Another look.
Hm. OK.
“What do you do as Guardians?”
Patient smile this time.

Wow. I really don't know what to think of a world not like mine which is full of threats & enemies & so on.

I try something I'm fairly sure of.
“You grow Rutabegas in your Garden?”
She nods, pleased.
“For the Annual Rutabega Festival?”
Nod. Smile.
“To make soup to share with all?”
Nod.
“And in the Great Clearing near here is a big kettle for this soup & even in the other times of the year, there is a bell to ring in case someone comes along in need of soup?”
Nod. But waiting.
I point to the chest I'm sitting next to. “Inside are blankets for any who might get cold in the White Woods.”
Smile again.

I look down, nothing good coming to me, save: “Why isn't my world like yours, where all are guarded & protected & fed & kept warm?”

“The Creature Common?”

I shake my head. Thought Fleas have come to my world, usually to pluck worry thorns from my or my beloved's head. That's how we first met them, years ago, before we knew anything more of them.

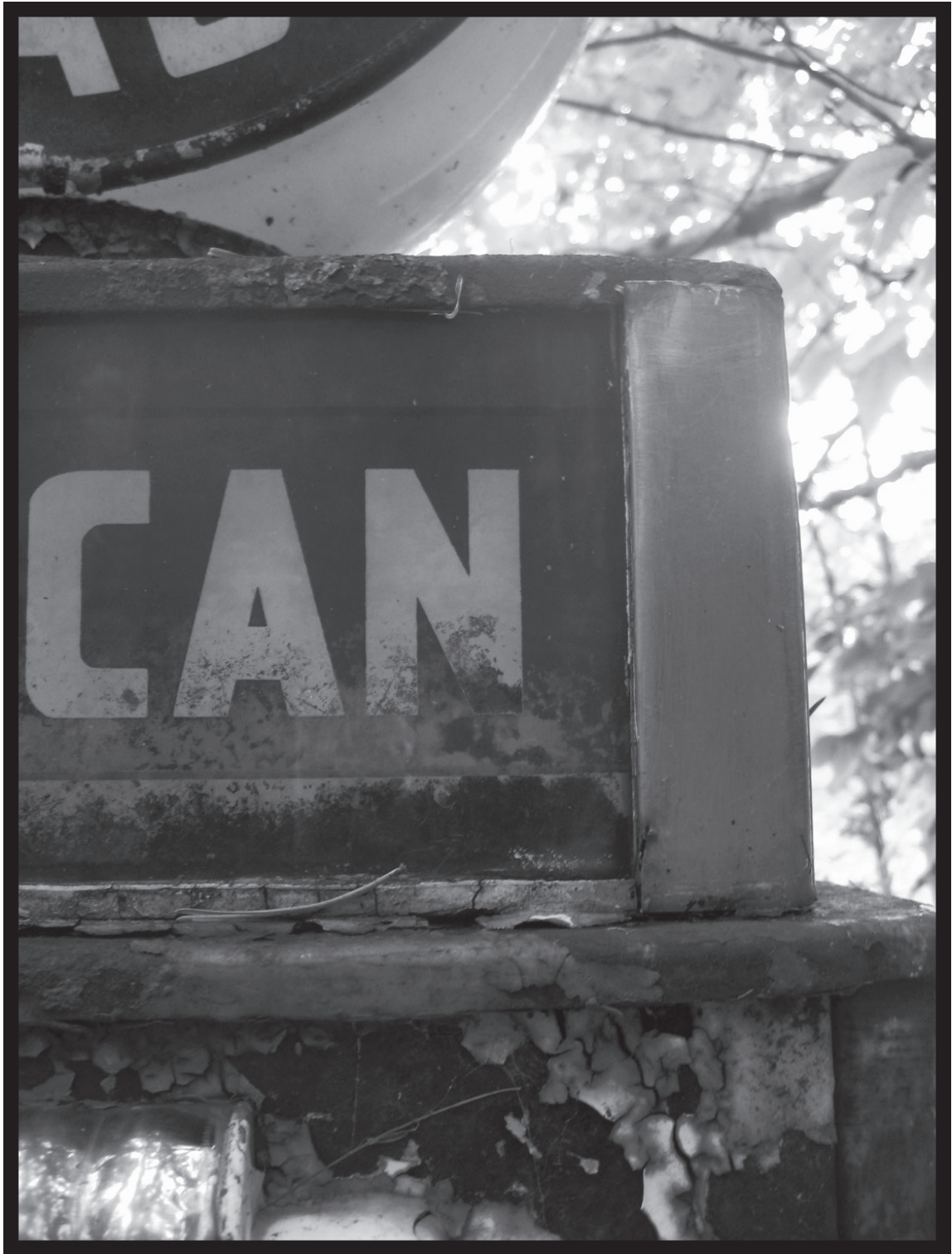
I stand up, & push my armchair aside, & I grasp the button attached to the fishing wire to pull down the door into the Attic. Unfold the ladder & land it upon the floor.

“Would you like to come?”

She peers at me closely. “Come back & see me when you return. Will you?”

I nod. She smiles & sort of curls up in her armchair & soon is napping. OK. Then.

I will.



lviii.

I climb up the ladder & into the Attic. It is fairly dark up here but not quite as there feels like a glow to every surface, a quality to allow seeing here, & so I begin to walk away from that door, testing if the glow holds, & it does, & my eyes adjust, & so OK, I'll keep going, walking along a floor that is made of rough-hewn floorboards, but solid, & I come after a few minutes' walk to two doors, one green, one gold, & a choice to make, I think, yes, these are the colors of royalty in these myths, these stories I write & live within, but I don't think I've seen them separated like this, a choice between one & the other offered, & yet here tis, to go on I have to choose, & I choose green hoping gold is not offended, & this is surely strange to think & yet I do think it, it's what I would think in this situation, choose green, notice the door handle I grasp is gold, & so maybe it will be OK, I hope, turn the handle & push in & find I am somewhere else, whether really there or a kind of simulacrum.

lix.

I'm back at the desert festival again, really it seems, & yet, & yet again, & I am wearing a certain hat, one I know belongs to a certain small Creature friend of mine, a purple furry dancing Creature, ribbons in his paws to dance with, a bow above his darkeyed brow—

His name is Pirth, I have known him a long time. He does not often speak with words & yet dances beautifully & will on lucky occasion pat someone's nose in praise—

It's a fisher's hat, with a chin-strap, one he has worn a very long time, warm & likely his only possession but for ribbons & bows. Creatures own little, or nothing really, & yet he has travelled long with these few things.

I found it in the back of the old green bus, back in that Western city, last bus of the night, returning from the hospital, found it in the very back seat, sort of tucked way down in a dark crevasse, & I thought of my little Creature friend, who was often cold. Folds nicely to fit his small head.

One day I did not know where he was anymore, & I kept the fisher hat to remember him, & then another day I did not know where the hat was anymore. And days upon sad, seething days, till recently, when dreams nudged into my waking, taking me by the scruff & nudging, & nudging harder, until one moment I open my eyes, & I'm back at the desert festival again, & my little Creature friend's Pirth's fisher hat is in my hands.

Back then, at the festival, I would sit back down, on the desert floor, festival loud & cheerful all around us, & I would look at Pirth, & he would deep darkeyed look at me, very calmly, & now I was calmer, because he is a good friend, knows how I get, excited, overblown, too full of the dramas for any one of them to take hold, offer a path.

Deep, dark eyes, very soft & pleasant purple fur, & I'm very glad for him, & he reaches out his little paw & pats me lucky moment on the nose & I think: *how cool you are, how cool you are,*

how very cool you are . . . & then he hops off my knee & begins to do his desert dance, a kind of peaceful frenetic rocking back & forth, the ribbons in his paws & his fisher's hat flying wildly about him, like he can listen to all the human musics, the drumming, the electronica, the cries & laughter, & the desert noises, & the wind, & the celestial music above, & the roiling below in the earth itself, & dance it wildly, happily, calmly, freely . . .

Ohhhh shittt.

I sit up in the faintly glowing hallway, so far away from that desert, & yet here is the little fisher's hat in my hands, & here sitting on my knee is my miracle beauty of a little friend Pirth, looking at me, reaching up to pat my nose—

Ohhhh happiness.

I stand with him now in my upturned hand, watching me calmly. We are not in the desert right now, it is not those other years, & yet here we are in this strange new place, together again, & I nod. Put his hat on him properly. Pat his little nose, & walk on to see more.

lx.

One thing, among countless, I've learned from Creatures is that *you never know with people-folks.*

We, Pirth & I, are now making our way along a narrow hallway in the Attic, low-ceilinged, rough floor-boards, full of gaps & splinters under foot. I think the low ceiling might even have nails poking out of it.

So slow, careful, hunched low walking for a fair stretch, tiring, & I'm ready for a stop when a light brighter than the low constant glow thus far—

Walk, walk, try not to hurry & stumble—

Come to what is a small library, maybe the smallest I've ever seen. A green & gold armchair, looks old but comfortable; next to it a small table with a shaggy lamp on it; next to that a one-shelf bookcase.

Upon it a row of books, I look closer & see they are a series about Mulronie the Space Pirate.

Oh. Ah. I've had a Space Pirate Burger at Mulronie's, sure, & that TV commercial where cartoon Mulronie takes off in his spaceship, crying, "Mulronie's Space Pirate Burgers! They're Co-Co-Co-Cosmically Deeelicious!"

And that Mulronie the Space Pirate cartoon show that didn't last long.

But the books themselves, I read them once, well twice, but it was a long time ago & I had

chased away from them since. Some things become too important, like you're starving & you take way too big a bite of something & it's deeelicious like the Space Pirate Burger but too much, you're choking, so deeelicious, have to spit it out, *have to spit it out*—

I open my eyes. *Whoa*. Pirth is sitting calmly on my knee. I lean forward, hoping for & happily receiving a furry pat on my nose. And there is a letter folded on my other knee. Rough burnt color paper.

I unfold it & read aloud to Pirth:

“Everyone has read the five famous books written about Mulronie the Space Pirate. The shortest, mightiest bandito in all of outer space. Everyone knows that when he was twelve, in 1951, he had a strange encounter, under the starry skies, out in the fields beyond the farmhouse where he lived. Something happened that night, & it changed him. And everyone knows that when he was a young feller, in 'bout 1969, he was part of that *other* mission to the moon, the one you *don't* hear about—where Mulronie first became friends with the Cacklebird, who drives the Famous Space Tugboat.

“Everyone knows how the books detail his eventual departing Earth, Terra, homeland, whatever you may call it, he called it many things, & how he made his way, by one means & another, into the far reaches of outer space.

“But what nobody knows is that in the year 2042, so far away from those starry skies back in that mythical year 1951, there came a sixth book about Mulronie the Space Pirate's adventures. Nobody knows that. But I'm telling this now, confessing what I know, that there was indeed a sixth book, detailing the final adventures of Mulronie the Space Pirate, beyond what everyone knows.

“Now some learning this may get worried & say: *oh dear, did he finally perish after all those years?* No, he didn't. He found himself a nice, small, semi-habitable planetoid—so far away from everything else, you'd think it was Kansas. But he had those later adventures before that kind of quasi-retirement he went into. It was those adventures that made the retirement possible, because he learned finally how to travel without moving, how to raise his kind of hell without lifting any of his thirteen fingers. That book does exist, I know, because I wrote it, his dear friend, his companion.

“It was a long neighborhood, on that nice, small, semi-habitable planetoid like Kansas. There were two houses, his & mine. We kept them far apart from each other, by agreement. I'd keep the manuscript of the sixth book overnight, wake up at first light, walk halfway toward his house. He'd meet me, take the manuscript, securing it under his arm, & we'd walk the rest of the way to his house, & continue our work.

“But what happened was the wind hit, & it blew hard, & he staggered, & he tumbled, & the pages blew all over the place, & there were no Woods to catch them, & there were no clouds to keep them from flying away, & *my goodness how those pages flew*, they flew all over the world,

all over that nice, small, semi-habitable world. We found all the pages we could, but not nearly all of them. It would have been much longer a book. But he was ready to retire soon, & just said, *let's do with what we have, my friend. Let the rest go.*"

I hold the letter, its several pages of burnt paper in my hand. Pirth is watching me quietly. Close my eyes & listen. The pages begin to vibrate, to *hmmm* in my hands. It feels nice. A strange music, moving in & around & among my breaths & beats.

Something, um, something, um *something*.

A story begins to tell me.



To be continued in Cenacle | 101 | October 2017

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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Algernon Beagle lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for *Bags End News*. Books made from the stories in his delightful newspaper feature regularly in these pages.

Mark Bergeron lives in New Britain, Connecticut. Probably. It has been I'd guess 15 years since I have seen him. But in the early days of *The Cenacle*, his friendship & art were very near & dear to my heart. His faux literary historical piece in this issue was originally published in *Cenacle* | 6 | September 1995.

Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado, where he is digging for sapphires in a mine all summer, & having more strange adventures that I hope will be written up for this periodical soon. More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Ace Boggess lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His poetry first appeared in *Cenacle* | 99 | April 2017. His poems in this issue are from his volume *The Prisoners*, published in 2014 by Brick Road Poetry Press.

Joe Coleman lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 99 | April 2017. His 2015 poetry RaiBook, *Kingdom of Clowns*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/kingdomofclowns.html>. Good luck, Joe.

Patrick Gene Frank lives in the mountains of Asheville, NC. The poems in this issue are his first contributions to *The Cenacle*. We recently shared a very long & fascinating email correspondence about the material in the last issue.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her 2004 poetry RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless.html>. Wishing her & her family much healing right now.

David Hartley lives in Maryland. His *Rants* last appeared in *Cenacle* | 99 | April 2017. Thanks for your friendship, then & now, Dave!

Jimmy Heffernan lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His prose last appeared in *Cenacle* | 97 | October 2016. His essay in this issue is from his *Divided Quantum* series, found at dividedquantum.net.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Vienna, Austria. His prose in this issue is from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*. More of his work can be found online at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz>.

Aldous Huxley was born in Godalming, England in 1894, & died in Los Angeles, California in 1963. He was a novelist, a philosopher, & a seminal proponent of the deep value of psychedelic drugs. His masterwork on the subject is his final novel, *Island*. Scriptor Press reprinted the essay of his in this issue in the 2001 Burning Man Books series, found online at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>.

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry regularly appears in the pages of the *Cenacle*. We recently had *another* delightful phone call.

Tamara Miles lives in Elgin, South Carolina. Her poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 99 | April 2017. She is also host of the SpiritPlants Radio show, “Where the Light Most Falls,” a program devoted to poets both famed & obscure.

Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 99 | April 2017. Her poems in this issue are from her new book, *Never Completely Awake*, which is available at <http://www.deerbrookedititions.com/never-completely-awake>. Her website is <https://martinanewberry.wordpress.com>.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Thinking again today of Tom & his son Jamie, & wishing them good health & all manner of other good things.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. She stays up with me all hours on nights like this one right now, finishing this journal of amazing artists, inch by inch, step by step. What an awesine gal.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. I don’t know what it means to have published 100 issues of this journal. Like so many of life’s other, good mysteries, I just am simply & profoundly grateful. Here’s to many, many more.

* * * * *





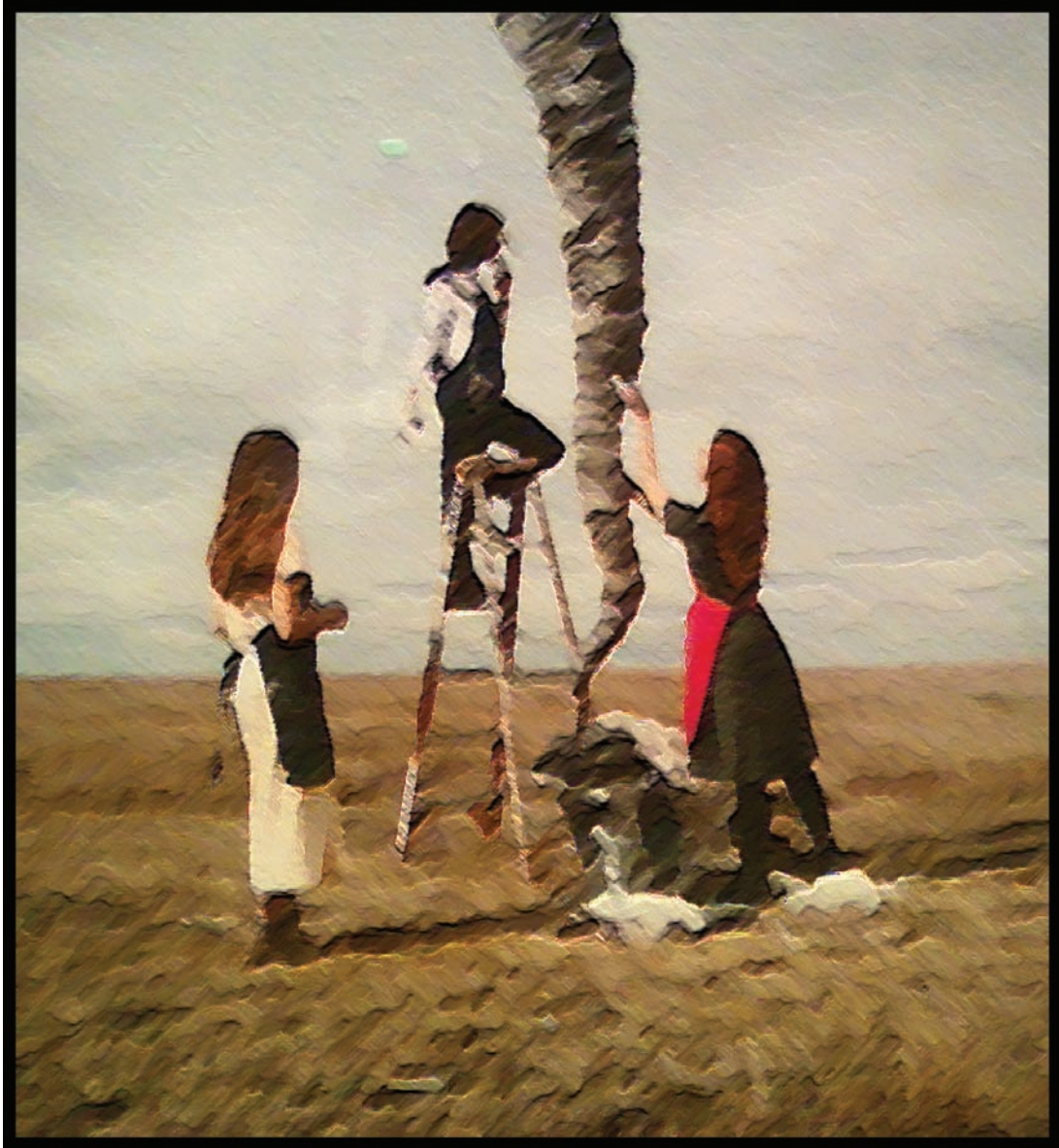
You know I almost lost my mind

Now I'm home, and I'm free

Did I pass the acid test?

Did I pass the acid test?

-- The Chemical Brothers, 2002.



Based on Daniela Edburg's "Grassland Tornado" (2017), Denver Art Museum.